



LESSONS FROM THE INFLUX

HOW EDMONTON WELCOMED REFUGEES FROM SYRIA...

and What We Are
Learning as They Strive
to Put Down Roots



Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations

**Lessons from the Influx:
How Edmonton Welcomed Refugees from Syria...
and What We Are Learning as They Strive to Put Down Roots**

Research conducted by Cheryl Mahaffy, Words that Sing
Design by Fox Design

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

email: info@ecvo.ca

FRONT COVER PHOTO: EDMONTONIANS WELCOME REFUGEES AT THE EDMONTON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, MAY 30, 2018.

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DUE TO ITS SHEER SIZE, THIS INFUX PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY TO EXPLORE SYSTEMIC CHANGES THAT COULD MAKE LIFE BETTER FOR OUR NEW NEIGHBOURS FROM SYRIA—AND FOR OTHER WAVES OF NEWCOMERS SURE TO COME.

مرحباً!

أهلاً وسهلاً بالأحباب في أدمنتون!

**WELCOME
HOME TO EDMONTON**



ISLAMIC FAMILY & SOCIAL SERVICES ASSOCIATION

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THE ISLAMIC FAMILY AND SOCIAL SERVICES ASSOCIATION WELCOMES NEW EDMONTONIANS AT THE EDMONTON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, MAY 30, 2018.

LESSONS FROM THE INFLUX

The sight of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi lying lifeless on an Aegean beach, his running shoes forever stilled, galvanized an outpouring of generosity toward Syrian refugees among Edmontonians, and around the world. Governments responded as well, opening the door to thousands who, like Alan and his family, were—and still are—fleeing the turmoil of war in Syria. In a typical year, refugees arrive in Edmonton by the hundreds; during the Syrian influx, more than two thousand came.

Agencies and individuals on the frontlines scrambled to welcome the newcomers and serve them well. Because the needs presented by incoming Syrians outstripped the capacity of any one organization, new and strengthened collaborations took shape, including some that hold promise of continuing into the future. Many heartwarming stories resulted as families were welcomed and accompanied on in the difficult journey of beginning to resettle.

“The arrival of the Syrian refugees allowed us to do things that traditionally we wouldn’t have done. It’s really good to figure out what allowed that to happen. Where we adapted, there’s a great legacy; where we didn’t adapt, and stuck with business as usual, nothing improved.”

Erick Ambtman, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN)

Even so, everyone involved is keenly aware that more could have been done—and could still be done—to embrace newly arrived Syrians and ensure they become fully engaged in community life. Like others before them, these newcomers face significant barriers to social inclusion. Poverty looms large for far too many, coupled with unaffordable housing, delays in learning English, difficulty in transferring professional credentials, untreated trauma, other health needs, discrimination and more. Due to its sheer size, this influx provides an opportunity to explore systemic changes that could make life better for our new neighbours from Syria—and for other waves of newcomers sure to come.

“No one likes the analogy, but I describe the Syrians as a giant jug of barium to the settlement system. We have one big cohort arriving at the same time, so you can follow it through the whole digestive tract—and see the disconnects and blockages.”

John Biles, IRCC

This narrative study, sponsored by the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, captures key milestones, representative stories and observations about a unique time in our history as a multicultural community, both to salute those involved and to glean insights that may inform our collective future. In addition to hearing from agencies with major responsibility, such as Catholic Social Services (CSS) and the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN), snapshots scattered throughout highlight just a few of the many others engaged in the all-consuming work of welcoming new neighbours.

Hearty thanks to each person who took time to contribute to this admittedly incomplete account of what Edmontonians are accomplishing together. Thanks as well to the City of Edmonton and Edmonton Community Foundation for funding this study. May we continue to learn how to welcome new neighbours and open avenues for them to participate fully as fellow citizens.

TIMELINE OF COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE SYRIAN CRISIS

March 15, 2011

War erupts in Syria, and the exodus begins that eventually displaces over 12 million people, half of the country's pre-war population.

2014

Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs) begin submitting applications to privately sponsor Syrian refugees.

August

First Syrian arrival – two sisters privately sponsored through the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton, a long-time SAH.

2015**March 31**

A local partnership involving the Islamic Family and Social Services Association (IFSSA) and Mennonite Central Committee Alberta (another long-time SAH) welcomes its first family, whose arrival at the airport is covered by The Edmonton Journal. Between March and October, one privately sponsored family a month arrives through this partnership.

September 2

The photo of 3-year-old Syrian refugee Alan Kurdi, dead on the Aegean beach, galvanizes widespread public empathy and desire to act.

September 8

The ad-hoc Edmonton community committee "Refugees are Welcome in Edmonton" (RAW-YEG) organizes a vigil on the steps of the Alberta Legislature and collects the names of attendees interested in learning more about ways to respond to this crisis.

September 19

Imams lead prayers at local mosques to build support for displaced Syrians. There, Syrian Refugee Awareness Campaign volunteers collect signatures to urge the federal government to meet its promised commitment to take in 11,300 refugees by 2017. Mosques and related groups also gather donations and offer interpretation and other support to incoming families.

September 29

RAW-YEG organizes a Syrian Support Information Session at EMCN with support from CSS; 180 Edmontonians attend in search of information on how to respond. Several sponsorship groups and information gatherings emerge from this and similar events held by various organizations, including CSS.

September to December

Catholic churches and other churches and organizations that applied to sponsor families welcome large numbers of Syrians.

October

A forum is held to introduce plans to form an Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership (ELIP), part of a federally funded network of settlement umbrella organizations.

October 19

The Trudeau government is elected and announces an ambitious goal of bringing 25,000 refugees from Syria by the end of the year.

October 22-23

Federal, provincial and local stakeholders gathered for the biennial conference of the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA) in Edmonton. They agree to meet at least weekly by teleconference to deal with the coming influx.

November

Organizations involved in welcoming the refugees begin holding Syrian Crisis Stakeholder Sessions to coordinate their work, hosted by CSS with provincial funding.

The grassroots group Edmonton Refugee Volunteers forms, using a Facebook page as its tool to share community needs, resources, ideas and events.

November 13

Gunmen and suicide bombers in Paris and the nearby suburb of Saint-Denis attack a concert hall, a major stadium, restaurants and bars almost simultaneously, leaving 130 people dead and hundreds wounded. ISIS claims responsibility for the attacks, escalating the potential for a fearful response to Syrian refugees.

November 14

In response to the Paris attacks, and as the plan to bring a wave of refugees comes into focus, Edmontonians begin calling agencies in great numbers, offering housing, clothing, money—or wanting to sponsor. In response, EMCN sets up an Emergency Relief Fund for Syrian Refugees that raises \$175,000 (including a \$10,000 donation from then-Oilers captain Andrew Ference) to support the settlement of Syrian refugees.

November 24

The Government of Canada announces #WelcomeRefugees, a five-phase plan to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada intended to, “provide rapid protection for vulnerable Syrian refugees while continuing to protect the health and safety of Canadians.” (www.canada.ca)

November

The Coalition on Social Inclusion (COSI) forms as the sector sees a need to couple immediate action with systemic change.

December

Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) begin to arrive. Their settlement services are coordinated by CSS.

CSS hosts a housing forum for landlords interested in housing Syrian refugees, reassuring them that the refugees would have financial support and access to a settlement counsellor to help sort through misunderstandings.

To help handle the outpouring of donations, a partnership forms between EMCN and the Edmonton Emergency Relief Services (EERS). On three separate occasions, volunteers, including a police crew, help load and unload trucks full of donations sent to EERS to be sorted and distributed to the newly arriving refugees.

December 21

Several local immigrant-serving organizations plan and host the first of several Syrian welcome gatherings, bringing together friends and community members to share food, culture and friendship. The Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society Cultural Team opens these gatherings with greetings, cultural songs and dance.

2016**January**

Islamic Circle of North America (ICNA) Edmonton hosts a meet-and-greet for newly arrived Syrians.

Newly formed sponsorship groups reach out to settlement agencies for support in navigating the initial weeks of refugee settlement. Document checklists are developed to help guide private sponsors through the complexities of resettlement.

January

GARS begin arriving in big numbers with unanticipated medical needs that are heightened by the flu season. Agencies collaborate to support CSS during the families' extended stays in hotels, offering services and supplies to meet urgent initial needs. Partners such as Boys & Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton & Area (BGCBigS), Edmonton Public Library and local mosques also provide daytime activities and evening events, including singing, dancing and spontaneous poetry.

Edmonton Police Services Equity, Diversity and Human Rights Division begins working with community partners to reach out to Syrian newcomers and other vulnerable communities.

January 8

January 8, 2016: The Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL) and Edmonton Refugee Volunteers welcome Syrians through a gala at City Hall.

February 13

A welcome event for Syrians in Rundle Park hosted by the City of Edmonton on a perfect winter day attracts 1,400 newcomers, about double the expected number.

End of February

The federal target of welcoming 25,000 Syrian refugees is met. Across Canada, 14,994 are government-assisted; 2,224 are blended visa office-referred and 8,954 are privately sponsored for a total of 26,172.

March

To address long wait lists for language learning, the federal government puts out a call for proposals to open new Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes for Syrian refugees.

Settlement agencies and Bent Arrow, with support from the Edmonton Refugee Volunteers, collaborate to host a second gathering of privately sponsored refugees, with culinary support from six Edmonton chefs who donate time and food.

March 31

The novel *Homes* is published. Written by Highlands ESL teacher Winnie Canuel, the book recounts some of the horrors that forced Syrian refugee Abu Bakr al Rabeeah and his family to flee, capturing the mix of hope and loneliness that come with the first months in Canada for him and many others.

April

To address the lack of childcare spots in existing LINC programs, the federal government funds a new Community-based Care for Newcomer Children program that enables families studying English to access daycare spots at no charge in their local communities. As a result, many more newcomer women are able to attend LINC classes. The program is replicated in Calgary.

Easter

Muslim Syrians hold an Easter egg hunt for Christian Syrians.

May to July

The Fort McMurray wildfire diverts energy and prompts many, including newly arrived Syrians, to fundraise and support Edmonton Emergency Relief Services' efforts to distribute goods and clothing to evacuees.

June

CSS hires a coordinator to support the fast-paced evolution of stakeholder information-sharing and collaboration, plus a second person to reach out to sponsoring groups and develop ways to link them together.

September

The University of Alberta Faculty of Education launches *Creating Welcoming Learning Communities*, a free webinar series to help classroom teachers involve and integrate refugee students.

October 12

A Chamber of Commerce breakfast involving the Edmonton Refugee Immigration Employment Council and ELIP launches “Onboarding Syrian Refugees: A Toolkit for Edmonton Employers” and draws media attention to the benefits of employing newcomers.

December 1

The Syrian Family Support Centre opens, offering collaborative, holistic and individualized support in a comfortable and welcoming environment.

December 5

Several newcomers from Syria speak at a stakeholder meeting, expressing thanks for the welcome they received and emphasizing their desire to use their skills, education and positive energy in gainful employment. During breakout sessions, their feedback underlines the importance of concerted collaboration in future sector efforts to welcome newcomers seamlessly.

December 29

In collaboration with several settlement agencies, Alberta Works begins processing Syrian refugee families to receive benefits as they enter year two.

**MARHABA**

Singer songwriter Mohsin Zaman, a newcomer himself, wrote Marhaba, Marhaba (Welcome, Welcome) in late 2015 and taught it to dozens of musicians with the aim of singing it to refugees arriving at the airport. He was doing exactly that a year later, December 29, 2016, when refugee Roy Abdalnor arrived with his family and took out his violin to play along. Mohsin Zaman has since posted the song as a video so others can use it to welcome refugees.

2017**March**

Settlement agencies, Edmonton Emergency Relief Services, Bent Arrow and Nina Haggerty collaborate to offer spring-break activities for newcomer children, youth and parents, many of them Syrian, in the Alberta Avenue Community League.

April

The New Canadians Clinic closes and intake of GARs moves to East Edmonton Health Centre. A grassroots initiative grows in hope of creating a robust and holistic clinic for all newcomers.

May

The Out of School Time Collaboration provides resources for summer programs for Syrian youth; the success of that work garners federal funding to expand.

June

Edmonton has received 2,250 refugees from Syria. Of those, 1,375 are government assisted, 710 are privately sponsored, and 165 are blended sponsorships. Alberta as a whole received 5,505 Syrian refugees. As the following pages of this report affirm, the work of welcoming our new neighbours from Syria has only just begun.

SNAPSHOT 1

MAKING WELCOME REAL: ONE MULTISTRANDED STORY

Like many grassroots Edmonton agencies, Action for Healthy Communities expanded its capacity in response to the needs of Syrian refugees. Using a mix of federal, municipal and private funding, the agency added its first Arabic-speaking settlement case manager in April 2016. It now has a handful of Arabic speakers who by mid-2017 had served more than 322 families (1,300 individuals) from Syria, Sudan, Iraq, Kurdistan and beyond—and still could not keep the waiting list in check.

Rola Chehayeb, that first Arabic-speaking staff member, still recalls the lone Syrian gentleman whose request for tax advice started the ball rolling. She took the time to explore other needs he might have. He spread the word of her helpfulness and her caseload rapidly ballooned to 150 families.

Among those Rola came to know and love is a family of nine led by Anas Al Mohammed and his wife Fikrat Alali. Their story is all too familiar. In 2012, after being caught in two years of fighting, they left their home in Mahardah, Syria, where Anas operated heavy equipment. They moved first to another province, but the fighting followed so they crossed into Lebanon. During three years in a refugee camp near Tripoli, they endured cold winters and had barely any income, due in part to laws making it illegal for refugees to work. While debating whether to return to Syria despite continued bombing, they were approved by Canada as government-sponsored refugees. Surprised and relieved, they were also somewhat scared, as they knew nothing about the land or its people. Within two months, their paperwork was complete and their flights to Canada were booked.

Fikrat was four months pregnant when the time came to leave. She began bleeding, but avoided telling authorities for fear of delaying their departure. Having experienced bleeding with previous pregnancies, she correctly predicted a positive outcome. Flying from Jordan via Toronto, the family arrived in Edmonton February 6, 2016 to a welcoming crowd whose gifts included much-needed winter outerwear. Piled into two vans, they went first to a Catholic Social Services reception house. A multi-week



ROLA CHEHAYEB (SECOND FROM LEFT) AND ACTION FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES AT THEIR 4TH ANNUAL DIVERSITY HEALTH FAIR ON OCTOBER 27, 2016, WHERE NEWCOMERS AND IMMIGRANTS CONNECTED WITH NUMEROUS LOCAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS VENDORS.

whirlwind of information, paperwork and appointments culminated in a move to a north-side apartment.

Rola met the family after visiting other clients in that same complex. As she returned to her car, Syrian men from surrounding apartments converged on her, seeking her support for their families—and for Fikrat. “She will need help, because she’s pregnant,” they said.

Thanks to that encounter, Fikrat had someone to translate both words and subtext during doctor visits and the birth of baby Amal. Now the family turns to Rola with all sorts of questions, from where to apply for rent subsidy to how to use the movie tickets left in the mailbox by a kind neighbour.

Over tea and treats in their living room, Anas and Fikrat express relief and joy at being safe. But they also worry about family left behind, who’ve scattered in the face of continued fighting and are begging to join them. “Each family has someone they want to bring to Canada,” Rola muses.

The couple also worries about money. The family received a federal stipend the first year, but that barely covered their \$1,500-a-month rent and associated utilities. “If it weren’t for the fact that they’re receiving child benefits,” Rola says, “they would be out on the street.”



ACROSS CULTURES: ANAS AL MOHAMMED AND CHILDREN ENJOY AN OUTING TO THE UKRAINIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE VILLAGE

Nearing the dreaded Month 13 in Canada, when settlement stipends end, their worry about finances escalates. Still in the early stages of learning English, Anas knows his chances of finding a job are slim. The family expects to depend for a while on Alberta Works, which pays even less. To make ends meet, they are hoping to find a unit in subsidized housing. But the waiting list is long and the point system confusing at best.

Four of their children are in nearby schools, placed in grades 1 through 7 but playing catch-up after years of missed studies. Fortunate to be in schools that offer newcomers English instruction in separate classes, they are quickly picking up the language. Fikrat would love to join the rest of the family in learning English but stays home to care for her littlest ones. So Rola arranges for Fikrat and other mothers to form an English conversation circle with volunteer Marilyn Scott.

Like so many Edmontonians, Marilyn Scott has made it her business to be a neighbour to incoming Syrians. She and her husband Neil Sawers and daughter Catherine Scott

(a fundraising professional) banded together with others to form the Sadaqah Group, originally to sponsor a Syrian family. Marilyn first connected with Rola in response to a request for a couch posted on the Edmonton Refugee Volunteers website. Sadaqah Group donated a couch they had in storage and, on delivering the couch, found the recipient sitting on the floor in a totally bare apartment. Inspired by that encounter, Sadaqah members Paul Chell and Judy Bauer delivered furniture and other supplies to multiple families.

Those simple acts blossomed into a multifaceted relationship between Sadaqah Group and the newcomers Rola serves. Besides contributing time, necessities, compassion and expertise, they have persuaded friends and family to donate Arabic-English dictionaries, Arabic keyboard stickers and more. "God must love me, because I was overwhelmed and then all of a sudden Marilyn phoned," Rola says. "She is my angel."

Many other individuals and agencies also support Rola's expanding team. A few examples: Excel Society (phones and computers for individuals who train in English and IT); the Canadian Arab Friendship Centre (meeting space); Vincent de Paul and Tofield's Busy B Bargains (furniture and clothes); Edmonton's Food Bank (food and other daily needs); Basically Babies (layettes with a year's worth of baby clothing).

"To have that support is so important," Rola says. "If it weren't for the community working together for the same cause, these people would be lost."

Rola serves as translator the day we visit Anas and Fikrat, pausing frequently to take the urgent phone calls of the day. She switches fluidly from English to Arabic, bargaining for lower rent, faster access to English classes and whatever else her clients need to settle well here.

As we leave, Fikrat dashes into her kitchen to prepare a gift for each of us. It's a delicious reminder of how much each Syrian family contributes, even in these early days when life for them is so hard.

A REFUGEE FAMILY IS GREETED BY EDMONTONIANS AT THE EDMONTON INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, MAY 30, 2018.

01

Photo provided by the Islamic Family and Social Services Association



CHRONOLOGY OF A WELCOMING

The arrival of Syrian refugees is a unique chapter in Edmonton's history. It's a chapter that challenged our community to be welcoming—and continues to challenge us as newcomers become neighbours and weave into the fabric of daily life. The next pages provide a brief chronology of this still-unfolding story.

2011 to Mid-2015: Early Warning, Early Collaboration

More than four million Syrians have fled their country since war erupted there in 2011, and millions more have been internally displaced. News of the massive migration spurred some Edmontonians to act long before the photo of Alan Kurdi's lifeless body on an Aegean beach galvanized global empathy. Besides responding to appeals for funds and prayers, some began exploring options for offering a new home to refugees from Syria.

"For me, the story started actually in 2011, when a global choir member from Syria came with a lot of worries about how things were getting violent in Syria. She asked us to sing a song called Oh Freedom, and she'd say, 'My relatives are terrified. People are dying. What can we do?' At that point the government wasn't prepared to do anything."

Suzanne Gross, EMCN

The Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton played a key role in those early months, working with more than a dozen Catholic parishes that wanted to help extract people from in Syria. Together, they submitted 20 refugee sponsorship applications in 2014 and welcomed their first families that fall. By September 2015, when the world took notice, St. Thomas More Parish alone had raised enough funds to sponsor 15 families. The archdiocese became a valued source of "how-to" information as other groups also began forming in response to relentless news of tragedy in Syria.

The flow of refugees from Syria was bottlenecked at this stage, with both government- and private-sponsored applications being processed agonizingly slowly. Yet Syrians living here knew friends and relatives desperate to escape war or refugee camps. In that context, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Alberta struck up an interfaith partnership with the Islamic Family and Social Services Association (IFSSA) to help Syrians in Canada privately sponsor relatives, with the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN) on alert to assist in settlement services. As so often happens, the passion of a few key individuals, including Donna Entz of Mennonite Church Alberta, brought the parties together.

MCC Alberta and IFSSA filed their first applications in November 2014, and the earliest families arrived March 31, 2015, six months before Alan's photo flashed around the world. For the next seven months, one family a month arrived through this sponsorship, receiving a warm welcome at the airport and ongoing support in settling. The Catholic Archdiocese also partnered with IFSSA and two other Muslim associations to privately sponsor refugees, welcoming 37 households in 2015.

"It's an amazing feeling when you're all waiting at the airport to greet one family and you see four or five little kids run out and you realize at that point in time that this child now has a future."

Ayub Umarji, IFSSA Board of Directors,
quoted in *The Globe and Mail*, Sept. 4, 2015

The interfaith, multi-agency partnership that opened the door to these early arrivals – featured in the *The Globe and Mail* as one of Canada's "most robust responses," – exemplified the collaboration that proved essential to welcoming waves of refugees from Syria in the months that followed. MCC has served as a federally sanctioned SAH since the 1970s, building a strong reputation for its ability to assist private sponsors of refugees. IFSSA's deep connections with Edmonton's Arabic-speaking communities enable it to identify families seeking to bring relatives to

safety and volunteers who can help refugees settle. EMCN offers programs to meet a wide range of settlement, language, health, housing, food and transportation needs. Plus it's able to refer elsewhere when appropriate.

Working together to welcome refugees from Syria had the positive effect of expanding the three agencies' individual and collective capacity. IFSSA, for example, is not only expanding staff (adding a program manager and an outreach worker) and opening two satellite offices in 2017 but taking steps toward becoming a SAH in its own right. What's more, the experience whetted the agencies' appetites to work together more closely in the future.

September 2015: One Photo, Mass Desire to Help

The viral spread of Turkish journalist Nilüfer Demir's September 2, 2015 photo of Alan Kurdi caused a sea change, suddenly putting Syrian refugees on everyone's want-to-help list. (The fact that the image of one toddler can elicit such response after nightly news of millions fleeing danger sends a message in itself about what turns knowledge into action.)

Early examples of grassroots action in our city included the group Refugees are Welcome in Edmonton (RAW-YEG), which launched a Facebook page on September 4 and by September 8 had organized a solidarity gathering and vigil at the Alberta Legislature. In part, the rally was a "call for accountability" to the federal government, which had imposed changes under Prime Minister Stephen Harper that were severely restricting refugee sponsorship while creating hardships for those who did arrive.

The Islamic community responded as well. At mosques in mid-September, for example, Imams leading prayers spoke about the importance of supporting those displaced by the Syrian war and the Refugee Awareness Campaign collected signatures for a petition urging the federal government to meet its commitment to take in 11,300 Syrian refugees.

"Groupings of organizations are getting together behind the Syrian effort, also within the Muslim community. My hope is it will continue to other efforts and carry over, so we can be a beacon, a model of taking in and integrating. And we can also learn from the mistakes we've made."

Mohamed Huque, IFSSA

Provincial governments and other institutions also signaled their support. Shortly before the vigil on the legislature steps, Premier Rachel Notley announced \$75,000 in immediate funding to the Red Cross for food, clothing, water, hygiene and medical assistance to refugees and migrants in Europe, plus a matching program for Albertans up to that amount. The province also pledged \$100,000 to Alberta-based settlement agencies supporting refugees in the province, funded through the Emergency Disaster Relief Program of Alberta Culture and Tourism.

By now, frontline agencies such as Catholic Social Services (CSS) and the EMCN were fielding hundreds of sponsorship inquiries as well as offers to donate clothes, household furnishings, dollars and time. Seeing the overwhelming desire to help, those agencies teamed up with grassroots groups such as RAW-YEG to hold information sessions in hope of demystifying the sponsorship process and identifying ways to be involved. One of the first sessions, on September 29, 2015, attracted about 180 people and laid the groundwork for several private sponsorships. Another "Refugee 101" session hosted by CSS attracted more than 100.

Meanwhile, settlement leaders were fielding multiple media interviews. "People were thirsty for answers, for information, for ways they could help," recalls Kathryn Friesen, manager of the CSS Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP). "It felt a little bit like we had flown under the radar, with nobody knowing what we do, and then all of a sudden everybody was interested."

"Not just agencies, but the entire city really came together to support Syrian refugees. And that continues. A lot of very strong volunteer groups have formed."

Jennifer Fowler, City of Edmonton Multicultural Relations

October 2015: Bold New Targets, Cross-sector Teamwork

Following Justin Trudeau's election on October 19, 2015, Canada's target for accepting Syrian refugees more than doubled to 25,000 even as the timeline shrank by two years. Now everyone was to arrive by December 2015—less than two months away. While the increase in numbers was welcome, the anticipated speed of arrival threatened to overwhelm local immigrant-serving organizations. (The deadline was later moved to February 28, 2016, but the compacted timeline continued to impact everyone involved.)

"The bottom line in every scenario was two to three times more refugees than we normally receive. That meant we had to adjust many of our systems and involve a lot more community stakeholders."

Alice Colak, CSS

It became clear that all providers would need to share skills and resources to keep pace with the speed of the influx and address the complexity of needs likely to be presented by incoming Syrians. "It was a case of responding as things were happening at the same time as trying to plan for what was coming," recalls CSS Manager Kathryn Friesen. "We started with the key stakeholders we've worked with in the past, all the regular immigrant-serving agencies. But we also knew we would need people from housing, health—and school boards, because one school might have 60 new children in a couple of months, with funding already capped for the year. As the word spread, we tried to be as inclusive as possible but at the same time task-orientated."

Mere days after the election, while gathered at the biennial conference of the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA) in Edmonton, federal, provincial and local stakeholders agreed to hold regular teleconferences in hope of coping together with the coming influx. "As a group, we agreed communications would be key, and we wanted to talk at least weekly to figure out solutions together, not separately," recalls John Biles, the

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) assistant director of integration for the region. "Honestly, a lot of cross-fertilization happened. There was no monopoly on where good ideas came from."

IRCC also invited providers to calculate what their services would cost, so that agreements could be put in place quickly once the new government appointed an immigration minister and allocated funds. "The provincial round tables helped make the ask credible," Biles says. Knowing that existing welcome centres could not hold everyone in the coming influx, regional IRCC staff also authorized the agencies responsible for supporting government-assisted refugees, including CSS, to book hotel space even before knowing exactly how many refugees were coming when. As a result, they largely avoided scrambling for space when hockey tournaments and other events made bookings scarce.

"In Edmonton, we all have a strong relationship across the immigrant-serving and settlement agencies. Whenever we can, we work together. But collaboration needs attentiveness, and we're all so very busy. Around families from Syria, we've had to make extra deliberate effort, because none of us have resources to do the work that's needed. So we really have to lean on each other."

Yvonne Chiu, Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative

The new federal targets redoubled desires to help, but also intensified an undercurrent of questions in some quarters about whether Syrian refugees would shift Canadian culture, increase the potential for terrorism and take jobs. In some cities, the mayor played a major role in welcoming and advocating for Syrian refugees. In Edmonton, settlement agencies took on that role. EMCN Executive Director Erick Ambtman recalls putting significant energy into being available to media in hope of setting a welcoming tone and keeping the community abreast of preparations.

EMCN also offered to serve as a drop-off point for donations of money and goods, since no other central repository had emerged. With monetary donations coming in fast, in late November 2015 EMCN created the Emergency Relief Fund for Syrian Refugees. The fund grew to \$175,000, making it possible to respond quickly to escalating needs—including the need for more staff to liaise both with arriving Syrians and the broader community. The fund closed two months later.

Clothes, furniture and other household supplies came in equally fast, proving more than EMCN could handle. Edmonton Emergency Relief Services (EERS) stepped into the breach, not only storing and dispensing donations but filling in gaps from its own storehouse to help refugees set up their new homes. Each time donations threatened to overwhelm the EMCN prayer room, police officers and other community volunteers pitched in to load the goods into trucks for the trip downtown to EERS. IFSSA, Edmonton Refugee Volunteers and others also directed donations to EERS and provided volunteers to help sort the mountains that developed.

One IFSSA volunteer, Dalia Abdellatif, coordinated evening and weekend sorting bees, becoming a crucial bridge between Syrians and newcomer agencies. Recognizing the importance of that role, EMCN hired Dalia as Emergency Relief Support Connector. She continues to work one day a week with incoming families at EMCN and four days a week at EERS ensuring that refugees receive the housewares they request as well as clothes of their choice. It's an example of the synergies sparked by the Syrians' arrival that, if supported long-term, hold promise to fill gaps in Edmonton's settlement landscape.



Photo provided by the Islamic Family and Social Services Association

DONATIONS

Students from the Edmonton Islamic Academy help sort donations at the Edmonton Food Bank, November 30, 2017.

SNAPSHOT 2

EDMONTON REFUGEE VOLUNTEERS: GRASSROOTS MOBILIZATION

Edmonton Refugee Volunteers (ERV) show how a dedicated crew of grassroots citizens can greatly ease refugees' entry into a new community. And how social media can amplify volunteers' ability to be present when and where needed.

Launched on Facebook in November 2015 by friends who discovered that Edmonton's settlement agencies were too overwhelmed to accept their offers of help, ERV quickly attracted 400 members and grew to 2,200 by mid-2017.

"We ❤️ Private Sponsors! Family arriving tomorrow in need of translators, are you excited to meet a brand new family and their wonderful sponsors? Message me 😊."

Facebook posting, ERV

Just as quickly, needs began emerging, mostly through posts and word of mouth. A growing database of Arabic speakers enabled ERV to dispatch teams of volunteers to help private sponsors and incoming families wade through paperwork and appointments. "We learned from the first families and used that template for others," recalls Julie Kamal, a software expert who launched the Facebook presence and continues to coordinate the group.

"We just wanted to fill the gaps and help support the organizations that already exist," says co-founder Fatima Al Sayah. "It starts with interpretation, but once you meet the family, you learn about all aspects of their lives. Some of the volunteers became attached to certain families and would visit and take their kids to events. So it started building and building—and somehow organized itself."

Realizing that many families arriving with government assistance were isolated and alone, ERV amassed data showing areas of need and shared that information with politicians as well as CSS and EMCN. Knowing that many Syrians have come through significant trauma, Fatima

pulled together an expert foursome to offer seminars that helped sponsors, volunteers, ESL teachers and others understand the mental health needs of refugees. ERV also organized welcome events and connected churches and other organizations wanting to help with opportunities to be involved. As the group proved its worth, various groups turned to ERV for interpretation and other needs, while also sending volunteers their way.

"We were able to build a kind of community, and that's exactly what we wanted," Julie says. "We wanted to make sure the families are surrounded by positivity and feel that people are rallying for them. We want to make sure all the kids coming in that have gone through terrible times have a chance at a better future. And in the end, for them to be independent and do well."

Not that everything went as planned, or that everyone is always in agreement. The very question of whether this unorganized Facebook group should become a society is a subject of ongoing debate. But it's all worth the sleepless nights, worry and work, Julie says. "My hair is quite grey now, and I've gained a lot of wrinkles. But my life has never been richer, and I have never felt so much warmth in my heart. These families are amazing. They immediately make you feel like family, and they're such a pleasure to be around. I cannot communicate enough how wonderful this has been."

"I sincerely believe as a community we should be able to jump in and help everywhere without being registered as a society and receiving funding. We have had disagreements about that, but I believe it turns good work into politics and paperwork."

Julie Kamal, ERV

Late 2015 Onward: Rapid Arrivals, Stretched to Serve

Edmonton has welcomed 2,250 Syrian refugees since November of 2015. They came through the following three sponsorship streams. The chart on the next page, created by Catholic Social Services (CSS) when hosting “Refugee 101” sessions for potential sponsors, summarizes expectations for each stream.

1. Government Assisted Refugees (GARs)

By July 2017, 1,248 Syrians had arrived in Edmonton as GARs, receiving federally funded resettlement services and income support for up to one year. In Edmonton, they are supported by CSS, which contracts with Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to deliver what is termed the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP).

2. Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs)

By mid-2017, 607 Syrians had arrived through private sponsorship, with another 273 waiting to come. PSRs are supported by permanent residents or citizens of Canada, often under the umbrella of a Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) such as a faith community or settlement agency. An untold number of Edmontonians formed sponsoring groups, committing to support their assigned families for up to one year.

3. Blended Visa Office-Referral (BVOR)

By mid-July, 138 Syrians arrived under this program, in which refugees receive approximately half their support from the federal government and half from private sponsors. As with PSRs, sponsors often become intimately involved in the daily lives of the newcomers in their care.

The following pages provide glimpses into the collaboration and challenges involved in welcoming our new neighbours through each of these refugee streams.



WINTER CITY WELCOME

A City of Edmonton welcome for Syrian newcomers, held in Rundle Park on an invitingly warm February day with free busing from newcomer reception centres, attracted 1,400 people, about double the anticipated number. Highlights included a welcome song by Nakota Sioux Nation Grand Chief Tony Alexis, road hockey with then-Oiler Andrew Ference and dancing to popular Syrian songs. The Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues was also there, showcasing services as well as ways to be involved in community life.

Syrian Refugee Sponsorship Streams

	GOVERNMENT ASSISTED REFUGEES (GARs)	PRIVATE SPONSORSHIP OF REFUGEES (PSRs)	BLENDED VISA OFFICE-REFERRED (BVOR)
SPONSOR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referred by UNHCR • Sponsored by Government of Canada 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsorship Agreement Holder (SAH) (faith groups, ethnic associations, etc.) • Group of Five • Community Sponsor (association/organization) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referred by UNHCR • Sponsored by SAH, G5, Community Sponsor
INCOME SUPPORT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial support by federal government for one year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial support by sponsor for one year after arrival in Canada 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial support by sponsor for 6 months and federal government for 6 months
HEALTH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberta Health coverage • Interim Federal Health (IFH) coverage (e.g., medications) • Interpretation services available through local resettlement agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberta Health coverage • Additional health coverage available through Interim Federal Health Program • Limited interpretation services available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alberta Health coverage • IFH coverage (e.g., medications) • Limited interpretation services available
LANGUAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LINC and EAL Programs (adults) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LINC and EAL Programs (adults) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LINC and EAL Programs (adults)
SCHOOL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-aged children can access educational institutions, and would need English Language Learning supports • Limited interpretation services available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-aged children can access educational institutions, and would need English Language Learning supports • Limited interpretation services available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-aged children can access educational institutions, and would need English Language Learning supports • Limited interpretation services available
EMPLOYMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligible for employment services • Eligible for employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligible for employment services • Eligible for employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligible for employment services • Eligible for employment
RESETTLEMENT SUPPORT SERVICES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSS settlement counsellors assist with initial resettlement (e.g., find permanent housing, orientation to Canada, life skills, assist to access health and education services, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sponsor assists with initial resettlement services • Eligible for access to settlement counsellor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically, sponsor assists with initial resettlement services

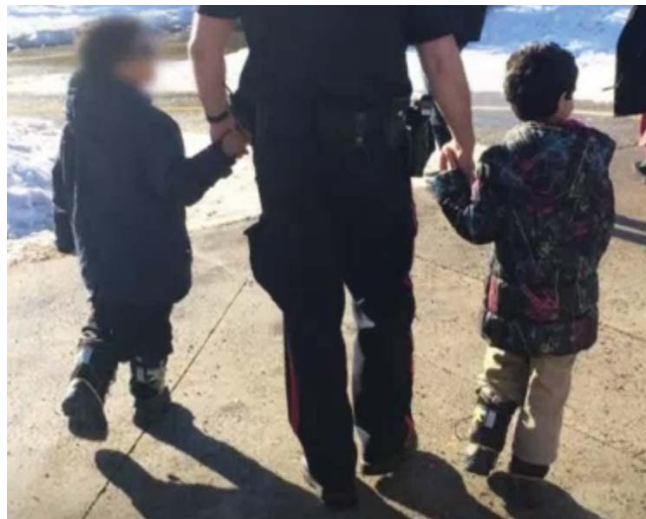
Prepared by Catholic Social Services, October 2015

1. Government Assisted Refugees (GARs)

GARs from Syria started arriving in Edmonton on Dec. 21, 2015. They came as fast as 50 a day, and within mere months most of the 1,248 destined for our city were here. As outlined in the schematic at right (Phases 2 and 3), families were typically met at the airport, taken to a reception house for initial orientation and paperwork and finally settled in a rental home. As the agency contracted to provide settlement services to GARs in Edmonton, CSS was responsible to make it all happen.

Due to the pace of arrivals, the reception house where GARS usually stay for an initial 14 days was soon at capacity and hotels were pressed into service. Serving additional sites—particularly sites not intended as reception houses—complicated logistics and staffing. Among the challenges: meeting the demand for laundry among families with multiple children and strict luggage limitations. The Chateau Louis Hotel on Kingsway, which became the main reception house, did its best to make the newcomers feel welcome. The chef invited advice on vegetarian and halal fare and went out of his way to offer food the newcomers would like.

CSS staff were typically onsite from morning to midnight to support the refugees and help buffer misunderstandings that understandably arose with staff and other hotel guests due to language and cultural barriers. Not to mention boredom for children suddenly thrust into an unfamiliar environment while parents were busy with such tasks as applying for permanent residency, obtaining social insurance numbers, opening bank accounts and attending sessions on life in the Canadian urban context.



TAG TEAM

Edmonton Police Service Sgt. Gary Willits and Community Operations Coordinator Iman Saidi (who speaks Arabic) became a common sight at Syrian reception centres and welcome events. The rapport they built is proving invaluable as they continue to support the community, particularly in racially charged situations. The work is part of a new Emerging Communities Framework that earned EPS a Human and Civil Rights Award from international chiefs of police. EPS also works with REACH Police and Youth Engagement Program to offer camps to children from various cultures.

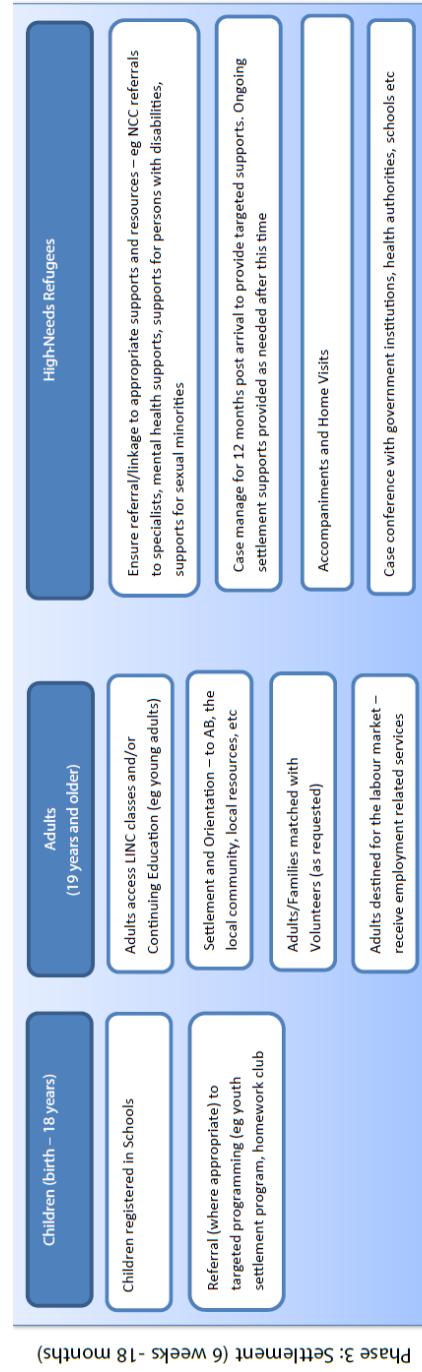
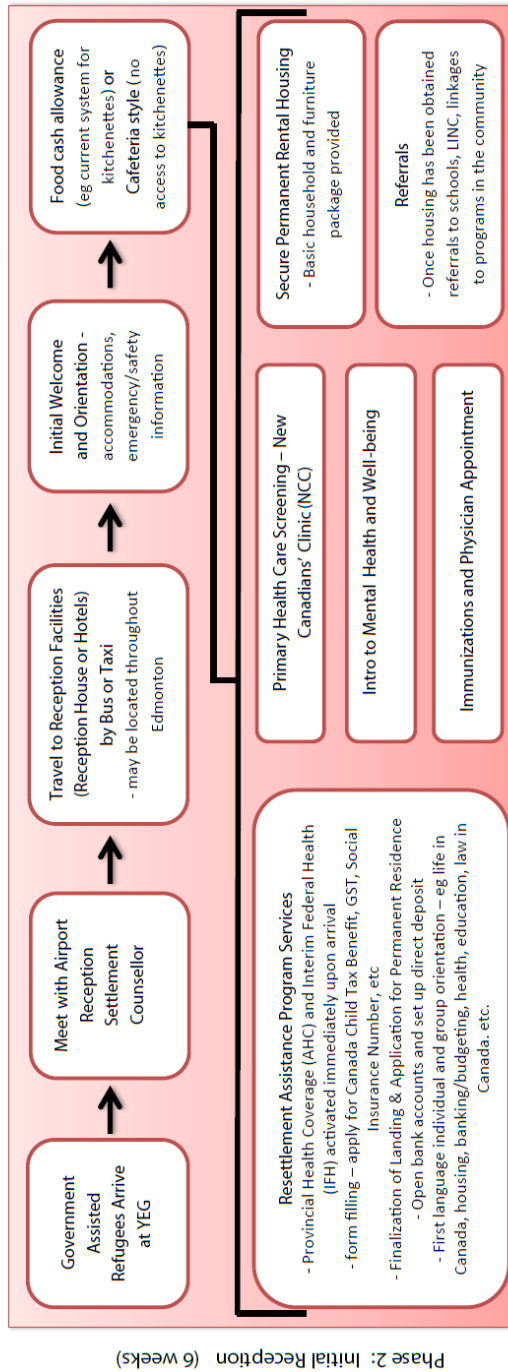


A NIGHT OUT

Newly arrived Syrians and their Canadian hosts connected through music, dance and poetry at welcome gatherings they took to calling umseya, or “a night out.” The joyful, cathartic evenings occurred at the Chateau Louis Hotel on Kingsway, where many GARs stayed during their initial weeks in Canada.



---DRAFT PROPOSAL for STAKEHOLDER MEETING on November 18, 2015---
Key Phases for Syrian Refugee Movement to Edmonton



November 6, 2015

Two hotel rooms became play spaces where children grouped by age were entertained and treated to glimpses of Canadian songs and games. CSS also set up a computer lab where youth could check in on friends and family via social media and enjoy familiar programming. Much-appreciated help with leading the playtimes came from many quarters, including two psychology practicum students, Edmonton Public Library programmers and staff from Boys & Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton & Area (BGCBig). BGCBig also bused school-age children offsite for day camp experiences that gave kids a foretaste of school and other group activities. “We’d partnered with Bigs before, but not to that extent,” says CSS manager Kathryn Friesen. “If we were to do this again, they would be one of the first we’d call.”

Other agencies also offered to help with particular aspects of the work, both at the reception house and later. Although CSS was not able to accept all those offers, existing partnerships expanded as needs emerged, and some new ones formed. Volunteers also played key roles. Some led English conversation classes. A soccer team bought balls for all the kids. Faith communities hosted Friday night activities. Fellow worshippers drove men to mosques for Friday prayers. Manicurists came in to do nails. “I was surprised at the quality of the services we were able to provide with the volunteers,” says Ese Ejebe, CSS Team Leader for Immigration and Settlement. “The refugees’ days were full of things they could do.”

“A lot of what we developed at the hotel was building on existing relationships, enhanced and ramped up. Coordinating all those relationships was the challenge.”
 Ese Ejebe, CSS

EMCN, also scrambling to serve larger-than-normal numbers of refugees, provided some volunteer interpreters, including Syrians recently arrived through private sponsorships who were already seeking ways to give back. Thanks to the Syrian refugee fund, EMCN also helped fill gaps in such basic supplies as diapers, toothbrushes, toothpaste and Tylenol. Perhaps most memorably, IFSSA and EMCN hosted welcome events in the conference section of the hotel—events that blended cultures in a way that proved both joyful and cathartic. Like many agencies, EMCN offered other help as well, and welcomes opportunities to collaborate more fully in the future.

“After we started seeing the results of what can happen when you collaborate, it did revive a desire to collaborate more.”

Suzanne Gross, EMCN

During the initial reception period, which typically lasts six weeks but varied in this case, CSS began connecting GARs to the services needed for longer-term integration, including language training, health care and schools. Those tasks were complicated by the fact that the families were much larger and less educated than anticipated. “The early profile we got of this population was nothing like the profile that arrived,” says Nita Jolly, Director of Integration for IRCC. “We were told they were quite literate, educated, with smaller families. None of that was the case.”

More than 90% of Government Assisted Refugees spoke neither English nor French, and although some had various levels of education, others were illiterate in their own language. Those factors led to heavy demand for translators and language training.

As a whole, Syrians sponsored by the government also came with more pre-existing health concerns than predicted. To complicate matters, many arrived during flu season, and flu swept through the close quarters. After making multiple trips a day to emergency rooms and medicentres, CSS set up a clinic at the hotel, with a nurse doing health screening and immunizations and doctors coming in daily to deal with urgent issues. Volunteers continued to transport those who needed to go off-site for laboratory work, tests and consultation.

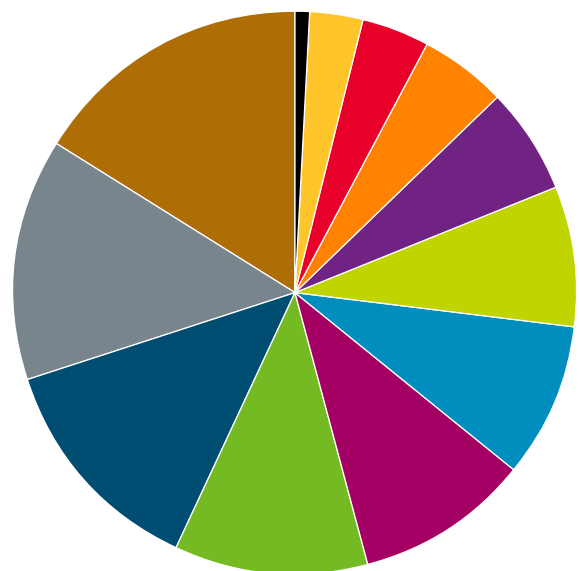
With many families needing larger apartments than the norm, the search for more than 150 housing units was even more difficult than expected. Apartments for larger families, even if available, cost more to rent than the amount allotted by the federal RAP program. What's more, available units tended to be further away from mosques, often a key consideration. As housing was found, the CSS housing coordinator played a valuable intermediary role, educating landlords regarding the limits set by RAP and helping refugees figure out how to live in Canadian apartments, where even the toilets come differently equipped.

"We were able to provide all these services, take care of health needs, move families into permanent homes—every piece came together. It was kind of magical how we were able to do it, almost like a miracle."

Alice Colak, CSS

FAMILY SIZE OF ARRIVALS

Through the peak of Syrian arrivals, IRCC kept a statistical "dashboard" showing how many were landing where. In Alberta, nearly all Syrian refugees went to Edmonton, Calgary, Red Deer, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat and Brooks. A June 2016 dashboard showed Syrians arriving in Alberta as a young population (more than half age 17 or younger) with larger family size than the Canadian norm. Family size (shown below) complicated the task of finding affordable housing. The report also noted wait lists for English language training and for child care during language training, two other needs that outstripped capacity in Edmonton and other receiving centres, particularly in the early months (<http://legacy.aaisa/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/June-AB-Syria-Dashboard.pdf>)



- One (1%)
- Two (3%)
- Three (4%)
- Four (5%)
- Five (6%)
- Six (8%)
- Seven (9%)
- Eight (10%)
- Nine (11%)
- Ten (13%)
- Eleven (14%)
- Twelve (16%)

The move from the reception centres was jarring for many, even though most families were clustered in Edmonton’s north and west, near mosques. Not only had the newcomers enjoyed close contact with new and old friends at the reception centres, but they’d had 24-hour access to help from either CSS or hotel staff. Now they were on their own to navigate schools, grocery stores, transit and more, often separated from immediate neighbours by language and culture. “It’s a difficult transition, and particularly hard on this group, because we didn’t have the capacity to make it that smooth,” Kathryn Friesen says. “They could call and leave a message, but we were taking a long time to respond because we were busy with the next group that arrived. That was very hard, managing those expectations.”

Some families going through that rough transition came to the attention of other agencies and volunteers, who did what they could to help. For example, Edmonton Emergency Relief Services made late-night deliveries to families who had just moved into their homes and needed such things as blankets and baby bottles immediately. Teams of Edmonton Refugee Volunteers stocked empty fridges and helped with interpretation and transportation. Both say they could have been more involved in supporting GAR families if CSS had passed along information about who needed what.



LATE-NIGHT DELIVERIES (OR OTHER TITLE)

Edmonton Emergency Relief Services made late-night deliveries to families who had just moved into their homes and needed such things as blankets and baby bottles.

Seeing unmet need, ERV advocated with government ministers for additional support. “Maybe CSS had been asking already, but when an independent group came in, they were able to provide more counsellors who spoke Arabic, and more services,” Julie Kamal says. “I have to give it up to CSS for stepping up then and doing an amazing job.”

Hundreds of would-be volunteers were also contacting CSS, eager to help, but the agency was too busy meeting immediate needs to do the screening required for volunteers working with vulnerable populations—a conundrum shared by other agencies. CSS did have a small cadre of already screened volunteers. In addition, the agency hired and began training Arabic-speaking staff even before funding came through to pay them. Nevertheless, the sheer volume and speed of arrival impacted the level of individual attention each family received, especially as new waves of refugees arrived while previous families moved from a reception house to homes of their own.

“Edmonton as a whole has been very gracious and very welcoming. Honestly, it’s incredible. I’ve never been so proud to be an Edmontonian in my life.”

Julie Kamal, ERV

2. Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs)

Canada is unique in providing for private sponsorship of refugees. Many Edmontonians accepted the challenge of committing to support a refugee family from Syria for one year, enabling Edmonton to welcome 607 PSRs by mid-2017, with another 273 waiting to come. The commitment is significant and long lasting. The Five Phases of Settlement checklist (see next page) developed by EMCN to support private refugee sponsors offers just a glimpse of the complexities involved.

Private sponsorship can prove rewarding for everyone, with refugee families well supported and sponsors intimately immersed in cultural bridging. The Syrian influx has produced story after story in which that is true. In fact, many say a robust private sponsoring group can provide a higher level of support than GARs typically receive. On the other hand, there are times when relationships break down or sponsors flounder in meeting their family's needs. In the case of Syrian newcomers, it didn't help that prior information about family size and time of arrival was scarce or inaccurate in many cases.

"These sponsors were amazing. They welcomed complete strangers into their homes and treated them just like family. People know they are loved, supported and belong, unlike where they were in refugee camps. It helps them get up on their feet quicker."

Julie Kamal, ERV

Rhianna Charchuk, whose MSc thesis in global health at the University of Alberta focused on privately sponsored Syrian refugees, reports that most sponsors she interviewed went above and beyond to help their families navigate unfamiliar systems and connect with mainstream society. "On the flip side," she adds, "settlement is really complicated, and not all sponsors were able to provide everything, nor should they be expected to." Some of the privately sponsored families she met were struggling to make ends meet, yet hadn't filed for GST rebates and child benefits because their sponsors were not aware those supports are available to refugees.

Most private sponsorships occur through organizations recognized by the federal government as Sponsorship Agreement Holders (SAHs). Although some SAHs are based in Edmonton (including the Anglican Diocese of Edmonton, Rehoboth Evangelical Pentecostal Church of Edmonton and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton), others (such as World Renew and Canadian Lutheran World Relief) have broader geographic scope and may not be intimately aware of settlement services available here. Some are staffed, others led by volunteers—and all were dealing with many files during the Syrian influx. In short, their capacity to guide private sponsors as newcomers settle is limited and varied.

Nor is there any mechanism for SAHs to share their list of Edmonton-based sponsorships with the many local agencies providing settlement services. As a result, EMCN and others funded to provide settlement supports to this very group have no way of making sure they are reaching everyone who needs their help. Several frontline agencies have identified this as a key concern.

EMCN's collaboration with Mennonite Central Committee Alberta and the Islamic Family and Social Services Association provides an example of what can occur when settlement agencies know who is coming. As the families began arriving in March 2015, staff from the agencies and other community members joined the welcome parties at the airport and made sure the sponsors had information about available services. They also hosted much-appreciated gatherings for the newcomers and their sponsors that drew in members of the broader community, including Aboriginal Peoples.

"Whenever we knew about someone arriving at the airport, we would go meet them and remind the sponsor group to connect with us. We saw that as a really good practice. There's more accountability, and we were able to catch things before they became larger problems. But it's one case at a time as opposed to a system."

Suzanne Gross, EMCN

Five Phases of Settlement for Privately Sponsored Refugees

PRE-ARRIVAL TASKS

- Find either temporary or permanent accommodation
- Start accumulating furniture/kitchen items
- Buy food items:
 - » Bulgur wheat (bulgur), an essential for Kibbeh and other lamb dishes; No. 1 small and No. 4 large (Only Syrians, Palestinians and Jordanians eat Kibbeh, raw or cooked.)
 - » Onions
 - » Chick peas for hummus
 - » Eggplant for baba ganoush
 - » Tahini sauce for the above
 - » Lots of lemon and dried mint
 - » Grape leaves, fresh or bottled, for stuffing with lamb and rice
 - » Cabbage for stuffing with lamb and rice
 - » Squash or peppers for stuffing with lamb and rice
 - » Dibs roman or pomegranate molasses (sold in many stores)
 - » Rice
 - » Lentils
 - » Syrian bread (khubar), known here as pita bread
 - » Flour for dough (to make meat and spinach pies)
 - » Pastries (with walnuts or pistachios)
 - » Semolina, known in Arabic as seed (a fine grain used with flour in pastries)
 - » Rose water for flavouring pastries (bottled and sold in stores)
 - » Filo dough
 - » Lamb
- Connect with settlement agency for interpretation and airport accompaniment

PHASE 1 (WEEKS 1-2)

- Pick up people at the airport
- Plan for a welcoming meet-and-greet
- Allow a few days to recover from the trip
- Explore neighbourhood at their pace
- If they are in temporary accommodations, explore with them where they would like to be, considering schools, mosques, etc.
- Go to Service Canada for SIN card
- Go to Alberta registry for Alberta Health Care card

- Schedule an appointment for health assessment and screening through New Canadian Health Network and connect to a primary care doctor
- Set up a bank account
- Orientation to grocery stores and other stores
- Orientation to public transit
- Shop for weather-appropriate clothing

PHASE 2 (WEEKS 3-4)

- Visit a settlement agency for a full settlement assessment
- Sign up for Child Tax Benefit
- Sign up for Child Health Benefit/Interim Federal Health program
- Register children for school
- Take language assessment for LINC classes
- Explore integration programs
- Help them understand budgeting for the Canadian economy
- Prepare them for eventual repayment of transportation loan (if applicable)

PHASE 3 (MONTHS 2-4)

- Register for integration activities, including leisure access, sports for the children
- Explore part-time work via an immigrant employment program
- Introduce to local activities
- Visit in their homes
- Invite them into your homes
- Join their celebrations

PHASE 4 (MONTHS 5-8)

- Regular check-ins and visits
- Help find networking support for employment

PHASE 5 (MONTHS 9-12)

- Wind down your support, ensuring ongoing supports are in place
- If language is still a barrier at year end, access settlement agency support to apply for Alberta Supports

Similarly, CSS was able to connect with privately sponsored refugees coming in through the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton, whose refugee work is coordinated through the CSS office.

In recognition of the fact that sponsors benefit from the knowledge settlement agencies can offer, CSS received funding to provide workshops for sponsorship groups. Although the lack of a database made it impossible to reach out to all groups, through word of mouth CSS connected with more than 60 sponsoring groups from a wide variety of faith and other communities. Less than half were Catholic. These meetings proved useful, helping sponsors connect together and learn from each other about settlement resources and services. The meetings also provided opportunities for sponsoring groups to receive training in cultural differences, various employment services, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and other concerns that often arise when supporting newcomers.

“Canada’s private sponsorship system has been very successful over 30 to 40 years, but we have no system to track refugees once they arrive. We really don’t know what happens long term.”

Rhianna Charchuk, MSc, Global Health

GIVING BACK

When the Fort McMurray wildfire struck in May 2016, newly arrived Syrians were among those who reached deep to help. Several Syrian families showed up at Edmonton Emergency Relief Services (EERS), eager to be of service. With the help of Google translate, they finally made their intent clear and were soon busy sorting donations alongside other volunteers. When EERS Executive Director Cindi Hache stopped by the sorting room, she saw a heartwarming scene of cross-cultural charades, laughter and hugs. “It was one of the best things I’ve ever seen,” she reflects. Syrian refugees also hosted a picnic in the park for families displaced from Fort McMurray. Pulled from group to group to help bridge language gaps, over and over Julie Kamal translated words to this effect: “We understand what you’re going through. If you need a place, you can stay with us because we have a big house.”

3. Blended Visa Office-Referred Refugees

Less than seven per cent of the Syrians welcomed during the influx came under the Blended Visa Office-Referred (BVOR) program. Like GARs, these refugees are referred for immigration to Canada by the UNHCR, the United Nations refugee agency. In addition, they are flagged by the IRCC as having good potential for blended sponsorship. Their files are sent to the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program (www.rstp.ca) to share with potential sponsors. (Those who are not matched with a blended sponsor within 14 days are processed under the Government-Assisted Refugees program.)

Thanks to that pre-screening, BVOR refugees may arrive more quickly and need less paperwork than other privately sponsored refugees. They also receive about half of their income support from the federal government, significantly reducing sponsors’ financial commitment. Even so, sponsors are responsible to provide social and emotional support as in the PSR program, and many become heavily invested in that work. The North Glenora Refugee Response Group (see Snapshot 3) offers a case in point.

Those sponsors, and the extended family they supported, amply illustrate the value of this intentional relationship while also highlighting many of the challenges discussed in the remainder of this report.



SNAPSHOT 3

NORTH GLENORA REFUGEE RESPONSE GROUP: BLENDED AND STIRRED

Some of the Edmonton groups that came together in response to the crisis in Syria applied to sponsor a family through the United Church of Canada. One of those groups was led by a woman for whom the initiative continued a tradition begun by her parents, who sponsored a family from Vietnam three decades ago and welcomed people of many cultures into their home.

That group was assigned a large extended family with UNHCR approval for blended sponsorship: father, mother, married son, his pregnant wife, three teenagers and six young children. The family fled Syria in 2013 after an explosion outside their home and lived in a Lebanese camp. Because laws there restricted the adults from working, the young boys sold paper on the street.

With the plight of Syrian refugees tugging at many hearts, this sponsorship group quickly raised more than the required \$50,000 and began preparing for a December 2015 arrival date. Generosity came from many quarters, resulting in reduced housing costs, handsome furnishings and mountains of clothing in all sizes—although not the traditional attire the women needed, as they later discovered.

Then the young couple's flight was cancelled, putting them too close to their baby's due date to fly. Plans were put on hold until February 2016, when the first family members finally arrived. "It ends up being a real 'hurry up and wait' process," says the group leader, echoing a common theme among sponsors.

Knowing how important it had been to live near the Vietnamese refugees in their early days here, the sponsorship team settled the Syrian family in and near their neighbourhood, even though rent might have been cheaper elsewhere. (The family was too large for any one available apartment, a fact they still regret.) "When they first arrive and don't have English, you can't just phone," the sponsors note. "Every single thing happens in person, so it makes a huge difference to have the families close by."

The group addressed the family's varied needs by forming subcommittees with targeted expertise. A team led by an RN has addressed a multitude of health needs, including vaccinations, physicals, dental appointments, PTSD and other mental health concerns. Another subgroup settled family members into English classes and a full array of schools. Volunteers practised English with the young mother, who desperately wanted to go to school but was delayed in attending due to lack of childcare.

"Our group was deep and committed. It was hard not to overuse them. I worried about translator and volunteer burnout."

Blended sponsorship group leader

Both United Church settlement staff and federal citizenship officials were too swamped with the volume of cases to give the group much support, also a common theme. The family had been in Canada for six weeks before the sponsors met with Citizenship and Immigration Canada and realized that if they topped up the family's monthly stipend to help make ends meet, the extra would be clawed back. In many ways, they were learning as they went.

"We looked around for any place that had services and helped the family access those," the sponsors recall. "There are a lot of amazing agencies." Among the resources they tapped:

- EMCN for expertise, employment training and an immigrant mom's group
- CSS for a newcomers' health clinic and a course about Canada
- IFSSA for food hampers, clothing, counselling and transportation
- Edmonton Public Library for books, parenting and literacy programs

"Especially during the initial weeks, programs helped them get involved, so they're not just waiting," the sponsors add.

Helping the family navigate Canadian legal and cultural norms has been a particular challenge, the sponsors say. Gender roles, discipline styles, seatbelt laws, needing a licence to drive a car: it's all foreign. "There are expectations of how they behave here, but not everything will change overnight for them," the sponsors say. "It's been actually a huge struggle trying to walk that fine line."

Fast forward a year, and the family has formed social networks through mosques, refugee families and other Arabic speakers. Now they have some of their own sources of information about next steps. The men would love to be working, but finding jobs is hard due to their still-limited command of English. "Even if three or four of them get minimum wage jobs, they still are going to be really struggling," the sponsors say. Knowing that, the group has added an employment committee to help write resumes and hunt for jobs while also scouring the city for resources for living on low income.

Family members are talking more about what they miss about Syria, and about their desire to reunite with a daughter and her family left behind in Lebanon. "Perhaps they can finally breathe and remember and grieve," the sponsor group's leader observes. "And there's still so much news about their home that would be depressing. So to be honest I think mental health needs are going to increase."

"They're a super, close-knit family. All the kids are like a big pack of puppies. They crawl all over each other and have a lot of joy. Spending time with them is just wonderful. Although difficult, overall this has been an amazing, positive experience."

Blended sponsorship group leader



THE GROUP HOSTED INFORMATION SESSIONS, BOTTLE DRIVES, AND BAKE SALES TO SUPPORT REFUGEE FAMILIES SETTLING INTO THE AREA.



02

VOLUNTEERS WITH THE ISLAMIC FAMILY AND SOCIAL SERVICES ASSOCIATION VOLUNTEER AT THE EDMONTON FOOD BANK, JUNE 2018.

Photo provided by the Islamic Family and Social Services Association.

COORDINATING BODIES

Even as Edmontonians responded in diverse ways to the Syrian crisis, our community was gaining greater capacity to coordinate, assess and improve our approach to welcoming newcomers. The following pages discuss the potential offered by umbrella bodies that have emerged during (and in some cases fueled by) the influx from Syria: Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership (ELIP), Syrian Crisis Stakeholder Sessions, Coalition on Social Inclusion (COSI) and Newcomer Mapping Network.

"In Edmonton we were proactive. We dealt with problems. The Edmonton allocation actually went up relative to other municipalities because of our ability to be responsive."

Erick Ambtman, EMCN

Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership (ELIP) and the Syrian Crisis Stakeholder Sessions: Coordinating Constellations

As preparations ramped up for the Syrians' arrival, some body was needed to coordinate the work of the many agencies involved. It so happened that in the fall of 2015 a likely candidate was taking shape: the Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership (ELIP). Our city had just joined a national network of local immigration partnerships funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) as a way of fostering collaboration, research and strategic planning among local settlement services. (See elip.ca website for more detail.)

Staff within the City of Edmonton's Multicultural Relations Office hosted an information forum about ELIP in October 2015, followed by a survey of stakeholders. It was soon determined that the emerging partnership needed to put energy into determining its own structure before coordinating something as complex as the Syrian welcome. Instead, CSS received provincial funding to convene and facilitate what became known as Syrian Crisis Stakeholder Sessions.

The first stakeholder session occurred in November 2015; by June 2016, CSS had funding to hire a stakeholder coordinator. Those were frenetic months for frontline agencies, recalls Wendy Mah, who served in that role: "It was a matter of, 'They're coming; boots on the ground, let's go.'"

At monthly meetings, stakeholders broke into subgroups focused on the following anticipated needs:

- Housing, both availability and affordability
- Health screening and care, including immunization, mental health and dental care
- Adult education, especially language learning, job readiness and transferring credentials
- Child and youth, particularly placement and support in schools
- Community orientation, often through mosques, churches and volunteer groups
- Employment, including the struggle to move from survival jobs to meaningful employment and integration

Some stakeholders expressed frustration that meetings cycled through known issues without any obvious resolution. But the very act of convening sparked some improvements in how newcomers are served. For example, the housing subgroup held a forum at which landlords were invited to include available properties in a new database; that information proved invaluable as large families began arriving. Some landlords also forgave damage deposits, offered reduced rent and held apartments open when arrival dates were pushed back. Libraries also expanded onsite services to newcomers.

"Coming to these meetings and starting conversations amongst librarians brought settlement services into three new branches in the north end. We also have expanded LINC classes to nearly all of our branches, and we're looking at having Arabic speakers on staff and involved in story times."

Chrissy Hodgins, EPL, Londonderry Branch

The meetings also provided opportunities for agencies to share experiences, and for volunteers to find support. “I met a lot of community partners who provided services that I didn’t know existed,” says Julie Kamal of Edmonton Refugee Volunteers. “I was able to take that back to our volunteers to help the families we were supporting.” At the height of the action, Wendy was communicating with nearly 70 stakeholder groups and 220 individuals. The individuals in her database, in turn, were forwarding the messages to others—including many whose involvement with Syrian newcomers wasn’t even on her radar. That gap in knowledge about who may have information to share or need to be kept apprised of unfolding events remains a concern.

Funding for the CSS-led stakeholder sessions ended following the major influx of Syrian refugees. The stakeholder coordinator position briefly became part of the ELIP staff at the City of Edmonton. Then, in October 2017, ELIP officially absorbed the work of coordinating stakeholders.

“I’m not the problem-solver, but I put people together. I’m trying to wrangle the stakeholders—all these wonderful people who are doing amazing work but sometimes function in isolation.”

Wendy Mah, Syrian Refugee Stakeholder Sessions

Meanwhile, the Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership structure as a whole has settled into place through multiple community consultations. Funded by the federal government through IRCC, ELIP is situated within the City of Edmonton’s Multicultural Relations Office, which coordinates and connects community members to address the needs of immigrants and newcomers in Edmonton. ELIP is steered by an advisory council of community members, including some who immigrated themselves. Decisions are guided by these working groups:

- Health and Community Wellness
- Skills Training, Education and Employment
- Settlement and Inclusion
- Research

As a first step in fulfilling its research mandate, ELIP commissioned an analysis of existing knowledge regarding four themes identified by community stakeholders:

- Immigrant pathways to employment
- Immigrant youth engagement
- Immigrant health and wellness
- Community involvement in settlement

Among the study’s findings: the issues highlighted in research 20 years ago remain unchanged today.

Besides guiding future research, the study is informing work on a local action plan for immigration settlement and integration in Edmonton. Both the research and the action plan were posted on a freely available online portal (ELIP.ca/knowledge-centre) intended as a virtual community clearinghouse of information, research, service models, resources, services, activities and events related to settlement.

“We don’t even know who’s doing research. For every 10 people you hear about, there are probably another 10 more. A lot of that knowledge is getting lost. We need to bring all that together and use it.”

Noelle Jaipaul, City of Edmonton

ELIP also finalized strategic goals in fall 2017 and continued to seek out feedback and direction from stakeholders and newcomers regarding future research and action.

Many people with expertise and experience in immigration and settlement are investing time and energy into ELIP. Although its ability to address Edmonton’s need and desire for a truly collaborative approach to serving newcomers remains to be seen, ELIP holds potential to enable Edmontonians to build on the partnerships developed these past few years for greater collective impact.

Coalition on Social Inclusion (COSI): Toward a More Inclusive Settlement Model

Some stakeholders involved in welcoming Syrians saw an opportunity almost immediately to learn from the experience and advocate for systemic change at a time when newcomers are top of mind. They came together as the Coalition on Social Inclusion (COSI). Since November 2015, this diverse and growing circle has been purposefully identifying and addressing issues heightened by the rapid influx of Syrian families.

“We tried to seize this moment to say, ‘Great that everyone is together working on this, but don’t forget about all the vulnerable families who have been here five or 10 years and are not socially included. If we’re aware of the larger frame, then we’re working on longer-term goals, not just short term.’”

Yvonne Chiu, COSI member from Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op

With expertise in such areas as multicultural family services, homelessness, education, linguistics, community development, dental care, nursing, social mapping, plain language law, political strategy and collaborative action, COSI’s focus quickly broadened to encompass not only Syrian refugees but all vulnerable newcomers. Not only their first year, but long-term; not only what these new neighbours need from us, but what they offer to us. A 2016 backgrounder entitled Looking Back, Looking Forward provides an excellent overview of work done to date, and why.

Many around the COSI circle were once newcomers. They know from hard experience that, despite the best efforts of many, a disproportionate number of newcomers (including those working in settlement agencies) are struggling to pay rent and put food on the table even as they continue to support relatives in their country of origin. That reality adds urgency to the search for new ways to embrace the latest wave of refugees.

“We don’t agree that what is here is sufficient. And we don’t want to perpetuate inappropriate ideas. We want to elevate to thinking to a model that’s healthier—that takes a holistic view.”

Deborah Morrison, COSI member from Mapping and Planning Support Alberta Capital Region (M.A.P.S.)

Those on the frontlines often see underlying structural issues but are too overwhelmed by daily crises to advocate for change. Together, COSI members are gathering the strength to imagine and advocate for a new settlement model that extends beyond tangible needs to authentic social inclusion.

COSI’s work is very deliberately grounded in the Social Inclusion Model depicted on the following page. Adapted from analysis by UK researchers Alastair Ager and Alison Strang, the model is grounded in the fact that refugees have—or should have—the same rights and responsibilities as everyone else including a healthy family and the right to shape culture.

The model underscores the importance of language and cultural knowledge and safety and stability in setting the stage for integration. Many refugees are living in the shadow of traumatic events and depend on the community to help repair core psychosocial pillars and journey back to wellness.

The model also highlights three types of connective tissue that are essential to an integrated society:

1. Social Bonds

Individuals and families within newcomer communities rely on each other’s strengths, including the wisdom of natural leaders, to guide their own journeys and build a base from which to link to the wider society.

2. Social Bridges

As newcomers become established, connections build between communities and with mainstream organizations (including community leagues and multicultural, sport and arts groups), compounding social capital.

3. Social Links

Newcomers and their communities influence large public institutions, governments and the Canadian identity the same as any other citizen and group.

Finally, the model highlights the reality that successful inclusion depends on equitable access to key means and markers of integration: employment, housing, education and health.

Social Inclusion Model

Employment	Housing	Education	Health
<p>MEANS AND MARKERS</p> <p>Domains that represent outcomes that indicate integration, and can contribute as means to achieving outcomes.</p>			

Social Bonds	Social Bridges	Social Links
<p>SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS</p> <p>These domains are presented as the connective tissue between the foundations of integration and achievement of the markers of integration.</p>		

Language and Cultural Knowledge	Safety and Stability
<p>FACILITATORS</p> <p>Discrete domains in which actions can serve to facilitate (or constrain) local integration.</p>	

Citizenship and Rights	Shared and Shifting Identity	Family Wellness
<p>FOUNDATIONS</p> <p>This domain is the ground from which integration is possible – refugees should have the same rights as the people they are living amongst. Without equitable treatment and access, integration is stymied. Fluid Canadian identity is crucial for authentic sense of belonging to emerge. Family wellness is also foundational.</p>		

<p>5 PILLARS – PSYCHOSOCIAL SYSTEMS AFFECTING REFUGEE WELLNESS</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Safety 2. Bonds/Attachment 3. Identity/Roles 4. Justice 5. Meaning/Faith

Source: COSI Backgrounder, June 7, 2016
 Adapted from "Understanding Integration," Ager and Strang, 2008

COSI envisions a society that moves beyond the metaphor of a two-way street where people might pass each other without a second glance to a town square with multiple opportunities to form bonds, bridges and links. As the backgrounder puts it, “Communities don’t just exist; we need to intentionally co-create them.” How to do that? COSI advocates for a core team made up of constellations of well-prepared colleagues backed by supports and programs designed to holistically meet newcomer needs. The schematic “Components of a Model of Holistic Development and Support Towards Social Inclusion,” illustrates essential components.

The Social Inclusion Model recognizes that newcomers, even when struggling with past and present demons, have strengths, aspirations and potential to enrich Edmonton’s social capital. Traditionally, newcomer services have tended to focus on problems and deficits, observes Yvonne Chiu of the Multicultural Health Brokers. “When we shift to a more strength-based approach, it somehow moves quite magically and differently.”

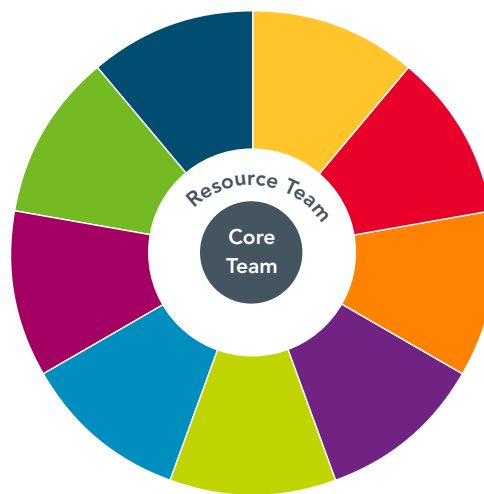
A strength-based approach also recognizes that newcomers know best what they need. “A lot of energy has been put towards, ‘Let’s do this because we’re good at it,’ or because it sounds really fabulous, without being guided by the people,” Yvonne continues. “We need to be very aware of our own biases and have the courage to work in an egalitarian way with people who are very different from us.”

“Egalitarian” also characterizes how COSI operates. Each person attracted to the circle is invited to contribute ideas and energy as areas of need arise, whether as individuals or through the organizations they represent. In little over a year, the coalition has proven remarkably agile in not only identifying service gaps but taking action through programming (often in collaboration within and beyond the circle) and advocacy. Results include a resource centre for Syrian families, myth-busting workshops for the broader community, advocacy to raise the age cap for finishing high school, plans for an after-school program to speed language learning, advocacy for a newcomers’ health clinic and mental wellness groups facilitated by leaders in the Syrian community.

“We have this opportunity once a month to step back, look at what is happening in all different sectors and think holistically about how we are supporting social inclusion. We can zoom in and zoom out because we have a compelling framework, and we’re guided by the people we serve to create pilots that address what needs to be done.”

Yvonne Chiu, Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative

Components of a Model of Holistic Development and Support Towards Social Inclusion



- **Core Team** includes 3 constellations of colleagues:
 1. A team of thoughtfully recruited, well trained and supported community workers with bicultural and bilingual
 2. Highly skilled mental health & family support resource people
 3. Settlement & immigrant-serving organizations for both privately sponsored & government assisted refugees
- **Resource Team** with connection to program and policy coordination
- Political engagement to pursue a holistic model of long-term social inclusion
- Public education campaign & service provider preparation
- “Backbone Support” of timely research on best practices elsewhere and within Alberta, evaluation of our model development & implementation
- Holistic health, mental health and family support being attentive to intra-familial relationship and well-being
- Housing (affordable & sustainable) and community development
 - within faith and ethnic communities
 - across diverse citizens within geographic communities
- Schools for children
 - intentional support for teachers & principal
- Parenting programming that builds parents capacity, children & youth sense of identity
- Youth development programs to prevent “gang recruitment” and nurtures indigenous leadership
- English learning support and employment based on existing assets with career development orientation

SNAPSHOT 4

SYRIAN FAMILY SUPPORT CENTRE NESTED AND BRIDGING

For a glimpse of the Social Inclusion Model in action, stop in at the Syrian Family Support Centre. Opened September 1, 2016, the centre has become a second home to most of the Syrian youth and parents living in north, northeast and east Edmonton.

Furnished like a Syrian home thanks to generous members of Edmonton's Arabic and Kurdish communities, the centre continues to benefit from countless donations of time, food and other needs. Staffed by Arabic and Kurdish members of the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op in collaboration with the Multicultural Family Resource Society (MFRS) the centre also works closely with numerous other agencies and volunteers. "Our work is highly holistic," says the centre's Niga Jalal. "We aim to work collaboratively with other service providers on the key pillars of social inclusion."

"People know what they need. They don't know how to get it at first, but they guide you in how to work for their need. When you give them a role and empower them, they have it in them."

Sabah Tahir, Syrian Family Support Centre

The centre quite intentionally builds its programming around the strengths and expressed needs of the Syrians it serves. As a result, it offers several weekly events for youth, women and families as well as significant one-to-one support. Depending on the day of the week, you might find couples learning the English vocabulary they'll need to go shopping, a youth group mulling over social media platforms, a circle of women chatting about parenting in two cultures while their children are looked after in the room next door.

"Just last week when translating in court one of the lawyers shared that somebody accused of domestic violence was put in jail over a month because it was very difficult to get somebody to translate for him, so they had to postpone. I felt at that moment, that our presence is able to help lift some of that stress off them."

Marvet Kanbour, Syrian Family Support Centre

The centre also seeks and fosters opportunities for Syrian newcomers, youth included, to connect with and volunteer in the wider community, an oft-repeated desire. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, cultural brokers are helping individuals and families wrestle with issues ranging from PTSD to unemployment to parenting Canadian style.

By fall 2017, the centre was serving 150 families with the help of CSS, REACH and others, surpassing predictions—and nearly overwhelming staff. The youth group alone has a very high turnout, with 30 or more attending activities ranging from university open houses to homework clubs.

Seeing significant mental health needs among the families it serves, the centre is also working with Dr. Sophie Yohani and Catholic Social Services to equip Syrian community members to have meaningful conversations about mental health. Using the ADAPT model (see Snapshot 7, page 48), the research is showing the value of opening conversations about five universally crucial systems that often crumble through war and trauma:

- safety
- bonds/attachment
- identity/roles
- justice
- existential meaning

This is a “nested” approach to service delivery, says Winnie Chow-Horn, MFRS executive director. The programs and services requested by the newcomers are the branches making up the nest; cultural brokers are the glue holding it all together. “Families can come in and not feel like they need to be screened and slotted into programs. Cultural brokers in that space really allow the families to just talk, building connection and trust that allow healing to take place.” (For more about nested service delivery, see www.mfrsedmonton.org/our-approach/.)

The concept of a satellite centre evolved as health brokers contemplated Syrian refugees’ long-term needs, recalls Multicultural Health Brokers’ Yvonne Chiu. “Families initially get support from government agencies and caring Edmontonians, but often we are the ones who end up caring for them as they transition out of support. We knew we didn’t have enough human resources to respond.” Funding to date has come mainly from the Edmonton Community Foundation and IRCC.

As families move beyond initial settlement, the centre is serving as an early warning system, helping COSI identify service gaps related to language learning, employment, mental health, family dynamics, children’s education and affordable housing.

Equally important, the centre is incubating natural leaders who are already serving as guides and supports to others who have just arrived—leaders who, with continued support, will gain the capacity to fly off and build nests that nurture others.



“When working with refugee families, we often hear, ‘I can’t imagine what they’ve been through.’ And they’ve been through a lot. But when I see a refugee family, I automatically see resiliency, strength, eagerness for a better future. It takes a lot for a family to survive war, the refugee experience, to have to leave your home and your life. And with Syrian families it happened really fast.”

Niga Jalal, Syrian Family Support Centre



Images: www.mfrsedmonton.org/our-approach

Newcomer Mapping Network: Visualizing the Settlement Landscape

Where in Edmonton are newcomers choosing to live? Are the services they need available—and reasonably nearby? What services do they access? How do they experience those supports? What could be improved? Such questions have prompted stakeholders serving newcomers to form a network that is tapping the expertise of M.A.P.S. Alberta Capital Region to graphically illustrate newcomer experiences.

Based on data drawn from their own work with newcomers as well as Statistics Canada and other surveys, the network has created several maps helpful in serving Syrian newcomers, including the following:

- Where GAR and PSR refugees from Syria have settled in Edmonton
- Concentration of Arabic-speaking households by neighbourhoods and postal codes
- Overview of supports and services available to newcomers in Edmonton
- Journey maps illustrating the barriers and supports Syrian families are encountering

M.A.P.S. Alberta Capital Region has also worked with various stakeholders to create maps for specific uses. Maps completed with REACH, for example, illustrate the roles cultural navigators play in specific newcomer communities. Maps created with COSI and Syrian newcomers depict the journeys of refugees trying to access the health care system. A suite of maps and resource listings completed with CSS and IFSSA help newcomers and service providers identify services by neighbourhood and topic. The map on the following page, informed by newcomers, illustrates both barriers that can keep newcomers from reaching out for help and circumstances that nurture engagement and inclusion.

As hoped, the maps are helping agencies identify service gaps and advocate for targeted funding. The evident concentration of Syrian newcomers and Arabic-speaking residents in north Edmonton, for example, prompted IFSSA to pull together funding for a northside office. The maps are also proving useful in reports to government and other funders and their early uses are helping agency staff understand the importance of collecting accurate and pertinent data from newcomers.

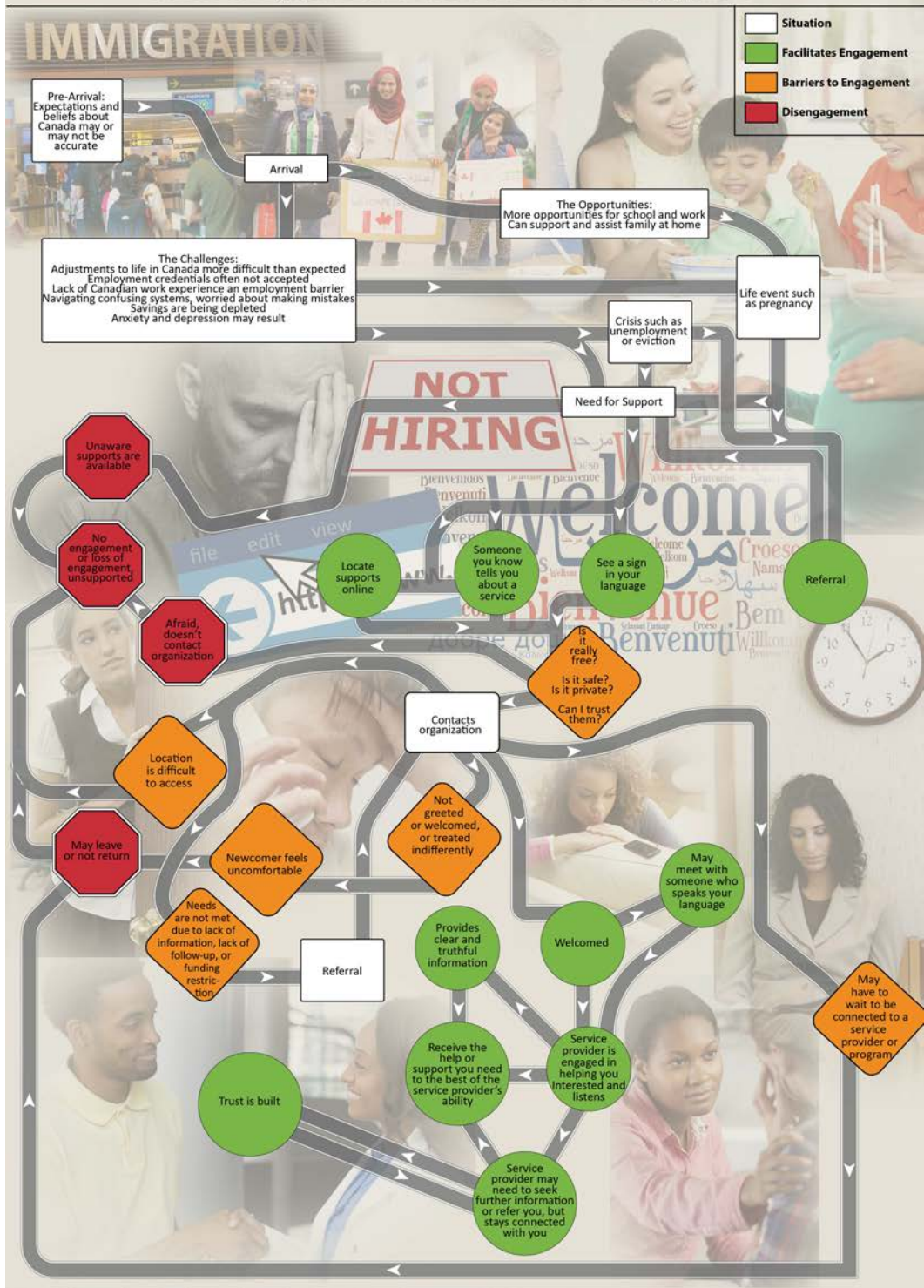


REFUGEEALBERTA.CA

Created by the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA) with funding from IRCC, the website refugeealberta.ca aims to serve as a portal for information from across the province for newcomers and the volunteers and organizations serving them. The website includes settlement services by community as well as a visual depiction of steps in the journey of settlement in Alberta, in Arabic as well as English. AAISA has also commissioned research on the resettlement experiences of Syrian refugees and on capacity and gaps among settlement services. Those reports can be found at aaisa.ca.

Engaging Newcomers

Conversations Regarding What Facilitates Engagement, Barriers to Engagement and Factors that Lead to Disengagement



JOURNEY MAP

This map was created by M.A.P.S. Alberta Capital Region to convey the findings of community-based research undertaken with newcomers in partnership with ASSIST Community Services Centre and the Multicultural Health Brokers.

Courtesy of M.A.P.S. (Mapping and Planning Support) Alberta Capital Region



03

Photo by Suzanne Gross

SYRIAN CHILDREN PLAY IN RUNDLE PARK AT A REFUGEE WELCOME
EVENT HOSTED BY THE CITY OF EDMONTON, FEBRUARY 13, 2016.

SETTLEMENT SUCCESSES AND GAPS: WHAT DO THEY TELL US?

As refugees from Syria move beyond their first year and enter Month 13, when most families receive less settlement support, it's useful to listen closely to the common themes that arise in their experiences to date. In particular, to identify gaps in the welcome network and ponder best strategies for responding.

"There are a lot of positive aspects about being here. First and foremost, safety. I don't worry for my children like I did in Syria or Lebanon. There's peace of mind. And respect for humanity. I don't feel mistreated or disrespected."

Conversation at Syrian Family Resource Centre, interpreted

But first, let it be said that the overwhelming sentiment is gratitude—gratitude in being safe. For those who have endured war, displacement to unwelcoming lands, hard-scrabble refugee camps, harrowing travel and perhaps the loss of loved ones, safety counterbalances many hardships.

Hope is a second common theme. A study of Syrians' resettlement experiences across Alberta by the Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA) in collaboration with University of Calgary and Habitus Consulting Collective found widespread gratitude for escaping violence coupled with optimism about being able to forge a better life. Despite resettlement challenges, the study concludes, newcomers in the study "continued to remain hopeful."

"I've translated for newspaper reporters, so I've listened to a lot of stories. I would go home and stare at the ceiling in complete shock. These families were in camps for years. Many of their kids have no education. They are amazing people to come out of that as strong and hopeful as they are."

Julie Kamal, Edmonton Refugee Volunteers

With that context in mind, the next pages document the challenges our new neighbours mention most often as they move into year one and beyond. We'll also note some of the steps taken to mitigate those challenges and offer suggestions for the future based on multiple conversations with refugees and those who serve them.

The segments that follow focus on these challenges:

1. Financial Hardship
2. Language Training
3. Employment
4. Housing
5. Health
6. Mental Health
7. Family Reconfiguration
8. Education

Other challenges frequently mentioned include social integration, transportation, weather and AGDM (Age Gender Diversity Mainstreaming). To some extent, those are woven through what follows.

"Here, I am safe, but I am also terribly lonely. There are no bombs, but our path ahead is still uncertain. But, the beautiful thing about my life here is that I can imagine any future I want."

Abu Bakr al-Rabeeah, author (with Highlands ESL teacher Winnie Canuel) of Homes

1. Financial Hardship

Most Syrian families are struggling financially, a fact confirmed by the AAISA resettlement experience study. Many are tapping sources such as food banks and mosque emergency funds to pay rent and put food on the table. That's a telling fact, as insecurity regarding housing and food is a sign of chronic poverty.

The problem begins in year one, with a level of settlement support that is out of sync with local housing and food costs. On top of that, most refugees (although not all Syrians) must repay federal loans taken out to pay for transportation to Canada. Many are also sending money back to relatives still caught in danger and/or hoping to sponsor extended family to move here.

As Syrian newcomers began passing their one-year anniversary in Edmonton, both they and their support networks braced for "Month 13," when settlement support is less intensive and newcomers without work shift to provincial social assistance. Anticipating even less income, coupled with more expense as initial rental leases and incentives end, many families worry about making ends meet.

Syrians are far from alone among newcomers in being at heightened risk of poverty. "There's such an economic gap between most refugee and immigrant families and the rest of society," notes Yvonne Chiu of the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op, which serves families from diverse cultures. "We haven't been moving fast enough to solve these social issues of marginalization, and when more come and structurally we don't change, more are trapped in poverty."

As highlighted in the social inclusion model (see COSI, page 34), liveable income is both a marker of and a pathway to social inclusion. It's the way to avoid trapping the people we welcome in a permanent underclass. As our city embarks on EndPovertyEdmonton, it would be wise to pay heed to the needs of those who've come from other lands.

The Travel Loan

Few refugees can afford to pay for transportation to Canada. Instead, they rely on federal loans. GARs arriving from Syria between November 4, 2015 and March 2, 2016 had those loans forgiven, but other families have begun receiving notices of repayment, further straining their budgets—and raising questions about inequitable treatment within and beyond the Syrian newcomer community. The Senate Committee on Human Rights recently recommended replacing travel loans with a grant program, arguing that people who have already been victims of violence and genocide should be "welcomed and not re-victimized."

"Particularly in economic hard times, poverty is really one of the key issues we have to tackle. Otherwise we will have a multi-generational issue of newcomers as the underclass. The implications are huge."

Yvonne Chiu, COSI member from Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op

Suggestions

- Provide a livable level of support for refugees in year one and raise social assistance rates.
- Forgive travel loans and replace the loan program with a grant program.
- Intentionally address newcomer needs in EndPovertyEdmonton.

2. Language Training

The majority of Syrians arrived in Edmonton knowing little English. What’s more, many have low levels of education in their mother tongue. Language barriers persist in limiting their ability to navigate daily life, benefit from education and find employment.

“The hardest is the language barrier. It’s hard to communicate with anybody. It takes time to learn.”

English learners at Syrian Family Support Centre, translated

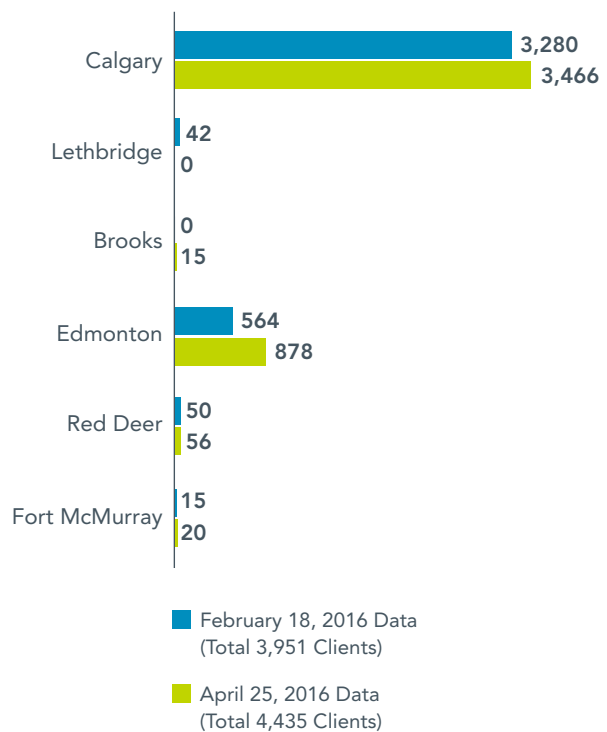
Refugees here typically attend one year of free federally funded Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC). Edmonton has numerous LINC providers, but because the Syrians arrived in such large numbers, waitlists formed. Even when seats were available, there was no central way for clients to access details, or for providers to share information. Also, mothers often stayed home to care for young children rather than attending language classes—a significant concern, since research shows that if women don’t learn English in the first couple of years they tend not to later.

IRCC addressed some of those issues by funding additional LINC classes as well as childcare for Syrians attending LINC. (IRCC also encouraged providers to hire itinerant instructors to offer classes closer to where people live, but so far no Edmonton agency has done so.) Sponsors, other volunteers and agencies have also put significant energy into offering language learning and conversation circles. Even so, many refugees (70% across Alberta in the AAISA resettlement experience study) passed the one-year mark feeling hindered by their level of English. “Generally, the challenge to learn English seemed insurmountable in the time that participants had,” the study concludes.

Learning English as an Arabic speaker poses particular challenges due to significant differences between the two languages in grammar, alphabet and reading orientation (right-to-left rather than left-to-right). The challenges are compounded for the many with limited literacy. What’s more, with so many needing to learn so quickly, classes tended to be filled with Arabic speakers rather than a mix of languages, making it easy to converse in Arabic rather than practicing English.

An AAISA analysis of settlement needs throughout the province found 163 language services in Edmonton, with 14% focused on language for employment and just four classes dedicated specifically to literacy.

Alberta: Unique, Eligible Language Waitlists by Location
(February 18, 2016 Data and April 25, 2016 Data)



Waitlists delayed language learning for many Syrian refugees. The problem was even more pronounced in Calgary than in Edmonton.

Source: IRCC Dashboard, page 14

Language is the foundation for both education and employment. Yet as the months tick along and anxieties about finances grow, many say they need to choose between language learning and employment. Others quit attending classes because they're discouraged by their lack of progress. Refugees also say some of the classes seemed disconnected from daily life and that they need more opportunities to practice vocabulary specific to the work they want to do.

Overall, there's a growing sense that language training should be more coordinated, personalized and contextualized to bridge newcomers to their new community and to jobs that fit their skills.

Suggestions

- Map the English language learning programs that exist.
- Coordinate availability and fill gaps, including those in adult literacy and employment readiness.
- Contextualize language learning to meet newcomers' life and work needs.
- Expand opportunities for newcomers to combine language learning with mentored work, internships and volunteering.
- Strive for cultural diversity in language learning classes.
- Enhance the capacity of community-based groups to provide English language or skills training.
- Provide incentives to businesses to employ and mentor English learners.
- Continue funding Community-Based Care for Newcomer Children at a level that meets needs.

"We don't want refugees to waste any time on a waitlist, knowing it pays off in every other area of settlement if we get this right early."

John Biles, IRCC

3. Employment

Unemployment and underemployment are urgent issues for many Syrian refugees, threatening to continue a pattern that keeps a disproportionate percentage of all Edmonton newcomers in poverty.

Arabic-speaking employers have stepped forward in admirable ways to hire Syrian refugees. But they tend to have small businesses with limited capacity to add staff, especially in an economic downturn. Also, although working in an Arabic-speaking environment can be a good first step, it usually prolongs the language-learning process, limiting long-term options and making it easy to be taken advantage of.

Only about 8% of the Syrians in the Alberta-wide AAISA Resettlement Experience Study had either full-time or part-time work.

Frontline agencies are striving to equip Syrian refugees to find jobs, aided by provincial and federal funding. For example, EMCN, ASSIST Community Services Centre, Bredin Centre for Learning and others offer training in employment readiness, resume writing and job search. Agencies host job fairs and in some cases even accompany refugees to interviews in hope of opening doors to employment. Those services are essential, particularly if done with skill and care—and valued, according to the AAISA study.

Yet the frustration of joblessness continues, both for adults who are accustomed to providing for their families and for youth seeking to gain Canadian experience and help their parents make ends meet. As restlessness and anxiety about finances grow, family dynamics are being strained. Language remains a huge barrier to finding work—or even being aware of employment resources that exist. For someone who knows little English, scheduling an interview by telephone can be beyond reach, let alone interacting with customers as many jobs require. Besides learning the vocabulary, newcomers need coaching in the nuances of work in Canada, from reading body language to volunteering as a stepping stone to paid work.

SNAPSHOT 5

MINDING THE CHILDREN: FINDING SPACE IN COMMUNITY

When Syrian families began coming to Edmonton in large numbers, the agencies offering LINC language classes had very little capacity to care for the sudden influx of preschool children. As a result, many women were missing out on language training to look after their children.

Wanting to see as many of the Syrians in language classes as possible, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) not only increased the number of classes but invited agencies to propose ways to address childcare needs. When efforts to expand its own daycare hours ran into licencing snags, EMCN received IRCC funding to hire a coordinator to help refugees find daycare in the community.

The resulting Community-Based Care for Newcomer Children program is available to families attending all LINC programs, no matter what their country of origin. Now, providers who encounter families with childminding issues refer them to EMCN, which processes their application and supports them in each of the following steps:

1. Finding a local daycare that suits their needs
2. Applying for provincial subsidy
3. Requesting a top-up from the federal government, so that the cost is free
4. Registering their children in the local daycare
5. Accessing LINC classes

The program also offers training for daycare staff working with newcomer children, especially children who may have been through trauma. A psychotherapist meets with daycare staff to build their capacity to meet the specific needs of newcomer children.

“What we have learned through this program is that many daycares are owned and staffed by newcomers,” says Suzanne Gross, EMCN manager of strategic initiatives. Those operators’ willingness to help has been key to opening new spaces for Syrian parents in language training.

“Most of these newcomers were very eager to do their part to welcome the newly arrived refugees from Syria, and engaged fully in the concept of this program, in part to support the community effort.”

Suzanne Gross, EMCN manager of strategic initiatives



Photo by Suzanne Gross

A YOUNG SYRIAN NEWCOMER AT A REFUGEE WELCOME EVENT IN RUNDLE PARK HOSTED BY THE CITY OF EDMONTON, FEBRUARY 13, 2016.

SNAPSHOT 6

SOLOMON COLLEGE: MORE THAN ENGLISH TAUGHT HERE

With waitlists for LINC classes ballooning in March 2016, the federal government put out a call for proposals to open new classes for Syrian refugees. Solomon College applied and by April was serving its first Syrian students.

“The first few months, we almost felt like a settlement office,” says Program Director Ping Ping Lee. Her office often filled with Syrians desperate for help in navigating unknown systems. The majority spoke so little English that even everyday commands were almost impossible to convey, sending staff scrambling for interpreters. Students missed classes to attend meetings about housing, health care and other settlement issues. Cultural expectations also impacted the classes, including a desire for a place and time to pray.

“When we decided to open the classes, we did it because we wanted to give back to the community, not for profit,” Ping Ping says. “But it became something that drained all my energy and ate into the time needed for other programs.”

The college applied for and received federal funds to hire an Arabic-speaking student support officer, who came aboard in July 2016. The college also turned spare space into a prayer room and flipped class schedules so Syrians could come in the morning rather than the afternoon. “We are a small college and very flexible,” Ping Ping reflects. “I think flexibility is crucial in times of change.”

By September 2016, with the Syrian refugees beginning to understand how things (including transit schedules) work in Canada and with many of their children finally in daycare, attendance was up and requests for help less urgent. But now the newcomers began realizing how long it would take to learn enough English to be employable. With the end of their year-one refugee support looming, Ping Ping says, language learning was not top priority. “They want to use the skills they have to get a job as soon as possible.”

The typical class of Syrian refugees at Solomon College includes a sprinkling of languages other than Arabic. Besides encouraging Syrians to practice English,



Photo: Solomon College

PING PING LEE (RIGHT) WITH A SYRIAN STUDENT

mixed classes serve newcomers from elsewhere, who've understandably resented the fact that they are waiting even longer than the Syrians for services, including language training.

Governments are seeking ways to fill learning gaps by funding initiatives that combine language training with industry-specific skills training. Solomon College could conceivably head in that direction, as it already offers training in hospitality, aviation and high school upgrading as well as language instruction. But for now, the college is continuing to focus its service to Syrians on language training and settlement support. Toward that end, it received permission to expand LINC to 120 students in January 2017, when another wave of Syrian refugees arrived.

“We're better prepared this time,” Ping Ping says. “Now we have the student support officer. Plus some current students are able to help the new students because they have more information about this country.”

“We want to make our school a place where students feel at home. When they feel care attached to their learning, they respond in kind.”

Ping Ping Lee, Program Director, Solomon College

“Hi everyone does anyone know if there is an electrician job or any similar jobs that are available right away. Please contact me thanks.”

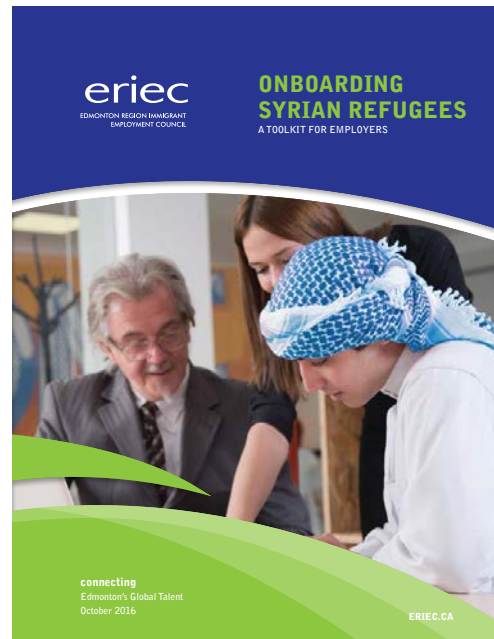
Posted on Edmonton Refugee Volunteers website

The Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council (ERIEC) is having good success in helping newcomers find jobs through mentorship, networking and training. But ERIEC focuses on professionals who are proficient in English—LINC Level 7 or above. Few Syrian refugees are at that level, even after a year of language study. ERIEC anticipates mentoring some of the more proficient Syrian refugees in coming months and years. Meanwhile, the ERIEC approach may also have ideas to offer for serving newcomers at earlier stages in resettlement.

Recognizing that the resume is one small (albeit important) step in a job search, ERIEC works with partner employers to carefully match mentors with newcomers. Those duos embark on a journey together that includes training at NorQuest for both. The matching takes into account newcomers’ training, skills and interests, so that learning leads naturally to the employment opportunities that make sense for them.

Youth between 18 and 30 also can benefit from programs such as BESKY (Building Employment Skills for Youth) at The Learning Centre Literacy Association. Funded by Employment and Social Development Canada as part of Skills Link, that program offers an eight-week employment readiness class plus 12 weeks of full-time work, all at minimum wage with employers paying just \$1.50 an hour. Agencies such as EMCN, YouCan and the Africa Centre offer similar programs for young adults. Although seats are too few, federally funded youth skills programs yield 80% positive employment outcomes for participants, many of whom are Syrians.

Older adults have similar needs. Although few recently arrived Syrians are educated beyond high school, the majority came with training and significant experience in their chosen line of work and are frustrated to find those skills undervalued here. “There’s so much talent in the community,” Niga Jalal says. “At the Syrian centre, we have teachers, an engineer, youth who have had multiple jobs before coming to Canada. How do we support them to tap into their skills and to feel competent in pursuing their careers?”



EQUIPPING THE MAINSTREAM

In partnership with agencies such as EMCN and CSS, ERIEC hosted a breakfast in fall 2016 introducing business leaders to the challenges and opportunities of hiring Syrian refugees. About 70 attended, hearing from refugees, frontline settlement agencies and employers who have hired newcomers.

Each attendee received an onboarding toolkit specific to Syrian refugees, now available electronically at <http://eriec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/ERIEC-Onboarding-Syrian-Refugees-Toolkit-for-Employers-2016.pdf>.

The breakfast garnered widespread media coverage, which the partners used to broadcast the “hire global” message and counter myths surrounding the Syrian influx. Although it’s unclear whether Syrian refugees were hired as a result of the breakfast, it helped build awareness and understanding – key first steps.

“I’ve been working all my life. To come and sit at home not being able to work is hard.”

Mohammed Alhendi, who owned a recycling plant in Syria

With mainstream jobs scarce, some Syrians are opening their own businesses. At the Syrian Family Support Centre, one woman has started a daycare and another speaks of one son who wants to launch a restaurant, another who hopes to be a barber. Some of those enterprises are offering food, goods and services from Syrian culture that are not readily available here.

Given those realities, it’s important that policymakers, settlement agencies, employment centres, employers and unions pay more heed to the diversity of refugees’ skills and interests—as well as their vulnerabilities. Besides continuing efforts to integrate newcomers into established economic streams, including areas with labour shortages, the AAISA resettlement experience study suggests greater focus on understanding the strengths of incoming workers and encouraging “new pockets of economic development.”

It’s also important to make sure frontline settlement agencies and businesses know about existing employment resources that may be useful for newcomers seeking work. And that mainstream businesses play a larger role in employing and mentoring newcomers.

“After one year, we thank the government for supporting us, but we don’t want to go to Alberta Works. This is not Syrians. We want to help Canada, not just take money from the government. Syrians want to give back to Canada.”

Newcomer speaking at Syrian Crisis Stakeholder meeting, December 2016

Among those concerned, COSI is forming a taskforce with the dual purpose of optimizing what exists and birthing an initiative to demonstrate what could be. Its members will be tapping community wisdom and experiences and welcome others passionate about this concern to join the effort.

Suggestions

- Provide paid on-the-job training that combines applied language learning with skills development.
- Improve foreign credential recognition.
- Create an employment skill profile of Alberta’s refugee population to help match skills with jobs.
- Foster networks of new Alberta workers to facilitate information sharing and address emerging work focused issues.
- Compare what happens here to elsewhere and look for similarities among successful newcomers.
- **Mainstream businesses:** ensure your environment is welcoming, employ Arabic-speaking newcomers, arrange peer-to-peer and other mentorships.
- **Service providers:** build relationships with employers open to hiring newcomers while ensuring newcomers have access to training for entrepreneurship, informal income-generating activities and career planning.
- **Unions, industry groups, employers:** develop resources and processes that enhance intercultural empathy and understanding, including mandatory intercultural, anti-oppression and human rights courses.
- **Policymakers:** fund programs that capitalize on newcomers’ diverse skills and needs and that encourage employers to integrate newcomers, including entrepreneurship, paid on-the-job training, peer-to-peer mentorship.

SNAPSHOT 7

BREDIN CENTRE FOR LEARNING FLEXES RULES TO SERVE SYRIAN REFUGEES

Most incoming Syrians didn't know enough English to pass LINC 5, the language level required at the Bredin Centre for Learning. As a result, Bredin wasn't on the frontline as the first Syrian refugees flowed into Edmonton. That changed after Tarek Fath Elbab, then a settlement counsellor at Bredin, said "yes" when asked to lead a workshop on resume writing at a local mosque. Word quickly spread that Bredin has a friendly and knowledgeable Arabic speaker, and Syrians looking for work began knocking at Tarek's office door.

Seeing the urgency of the need, Bredin waived language and other requirements so Tarek could help Syrian refugees with job preparation, resume writing, search strategies and interpretation—on top of his regular work of serving immigrants from all countries. As media articles posted on his bulletin board attest, some Syrian job seekers (especially those who can speak a bit of English) have had success. It helps that Bredin has built strong relationships with employers over three decades of helping multilingual speakers land jobs.

Syrians who speak little or no English have a far more difficult job hunt. Some have found work with Arabic employers, but those opportunities are limited. Attempts to open doors with fast food chains ran into roadblocks when applicants were unable to carry on a conversation, either in the interview or over the phone. Yet Tarek persists, coaching his charges through mock interviews, running conversation circles and even accompanying applicants to interviews. Knowing that the vast majority are farmers, he's hoping some will find work in agriculture and continue to learn English as they work.

Like all too many newcomers, Syrian refugees also face credentialing issues. Although many have significant training and/or skills, they may have left the proof behind in the panic of fleeing war. Others find that their expertise isn't recognized here. "Many of them were business owners," Tarek says. "It's not easy for them to come here and be told to go to work in a kitchen."



TAREK FATH ELBAB (CENTRE) WITH PARTICIPANTS, BREDIN CENTRE FOR LEARNING

"They would love to work—it's not like they don't want to. But it's tough to get a job with little English."

Tarek Fath Elbab, Bredin Centre for Learning

Learning English remains a major hurdle, Tarek adds. This group of newcomers knows less than the norm. Many had very little time to prepare after being accepted by Canada and, upon arrival, had their learning delayed by LINC waitlists. "There was no realistic calculation of the amount of language development Syrian refugees are going to make in a certain period of time," he says. "This is a big issue. If you bring that number of people, you should at least provide enough spots for them to start learning English right away."

4. Housing

Finding decent affordable housing is a common concern among Syrian refugees. Many were settled in places they cannot afford to rent long-term, especially while unemployed. Although some landlords reduced rents and some families received rent subsidies, rates of \$1,500-plus a month are eating up 50% or more of the typical refugee stipend. Experts agree that anything above 30% is unaffordable.

“Our income from the government is really good but not sufficient when you take into account the rent. This is a problem that is facing all the Syrians coming here.”

Respondent in AAISA resettlement experience study

Rates have dropped somewhat since the first Syrians arrived, but many still need more affordable accommodations. The fact that Syrian families are usually larger than the Canadian norm complicates the search. Some also report being turned away due to racist attitudes. Capital Region Housing offers much lower rent, tied to income, but waiting lists are long. Those who find more affordable places are reporting bedbugs, mice, poor air quality and other unsanitary and unsafe conditions both inside and in the neighbourhood.

“I have doctors’ notes from moms in our parenting group saying there are bedbugs. Because of the long waitlist for affordable housing, they’re still living in the same spot. They just can’t afford anything else.”

Niga Jalal, Syrian Family Resource Centre

In Edmonton, Homeward Trust is charged with shepherding a community-wide effort to provide safe, affordable housing and support services for all, but its most urgent focus is on those who are already homeless. COSI has a grant from Homeward Trust to draw together newcomers, policymakers and service providers in search of long-term housing solutions for newcomers. IFSSA has announced plans for a multi-storey housing facility specifically designed for larger newcomer families.

Topping Up Rent

Community Foundations of Canada set up a Welcome Fund for Syrian Refugees in January 2016 to steward about \$5.5 million from CN, Manulife, GM and other corporations seeking to help the newcomers settle. Homeward Trust was invited to administer the \$360,000 apportioned to Edmonton. Working with CSS, Homeward Trust provided rental assistance for one year to about 60 GAR families from Syria who had been spending the lion’s share of their government support on rent, leaving little for food and other expenses. Those who benefited were mostly smaller families and singles without additional income, as larger families were able to use child benefit cheques to help pay rent. The program ended in December 2017.

A recent AAISA housing study suggests encouraging homeowners to build accessory dwellings for newcomer families. A housing strategy unveiled in the most recent federal budget promises significant investment in housing infrastructure. Those efforts and more offer hope for future newcomers, but will not help these families.

Suggestions

- Ensure that rent takes up no more than 30% of newcomers’ income.
- Increase affordable housing stock for larger families.
- Subsidize accessory dwellings on existing lots where homeowners can house and support newcomer families in collaboration with settlement agencies.
- Provide culturally sensitive tenant support to all newcomers, including information on tenant and landlord rights and responsibilities.
- Host forums for interested landlords to provide accurate information about incoming refugees and the support they will receive.
- Deliver cultural awareness seminars for landlords renting to newcomers.

5. Health

Many Syrians arrived in Edmonton with a backlog of health concerns after years in a war zone and/or refugee camps. This was especially true of government-sponsored refugees, who tended to be among the most vulnerable. Nearly all needed immunizations and dental care, and untreated chronic illness was common. Like all recent refugees, they received health care for up to one year through the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP), coupled with coverage under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan.

Research by Rhianna Charchuk, among others, indicates that many Arabic-speaking doctors willingly expanded their practice to take on patients from Syria, and that medical professionals in general are treating those patients with respect for their culture and beliefs. Yet those on the frontline say the health system is missing an opportunity to address newcomers' needs holistically, raising concern that issues related to health will fester and grow rather than being resolved.

A key issue is the fact that Edmonton has no standardized system for ensuring that all refugees have access to primary health care.

"Appointments with family physicians are not long enough for evidence-based comprehensive health assessment. And if health concerns are not addressed in the first year, they will become really complicated concerns in future."

Rhianna Charchuk, MSc, Global Health

Catholic Social Services (CSS) receives federal funding to coordinate initial medical services for Government Assisted Refugees (GARs). Through the peak of the Syrian influx, GARs received their initial intake and screening at the New Canadians Clinic. Developed through grassroots advocacy about a decade ago, the clinic was well regarded for providing excellent, culturally sensitive health assessment, orientation and referrals. The speed of the influx prompted the clinic to build an expanded network of Arabic-speaking family physicians and specialists passionate about working with refugees.

"We went to the New Canadians Clinic, and they were great for us. Dr. Valerie Krinke, who runs that clinic, is amazing. They need more funding. They could be an amazing service if they could hire more people."

Michelle Young, North Glenora Refugee Response Group

On March 31, 2017, AHS disbanded the New Canadians Clinic at CSS and directed incoming GARs to the East Edmonton Health Centre (EEHC) for initial intake and immunization, followed by referral to family physicians for health assessment and follow-up care. With that move, Edmonton went from operating one of the nation's first health clinics specifically for new Canadians to being the only large city without one. An AHS notice predicted the change would "allow EEHC staff to better utilize the existing programs at the site, including the Family Care Clinic, the Urgent Care Clinic, the Public Health Clinic, the Community Perinatal Program, Mental Health services, Home Care and Laboratory and Diagnostic Imaging." A research collaboration led by Dr. Stephanie Montesanti at the University of Alberta's School of Public Health is underway to document the impact of closing the New Canadians Clinic.

"The New Canadians Clinic was born to support GAR refugees through a really intense health assessment to prevent problems down the road. And it has been successful, but underfunded. The Syrian influx has really reinforced that there is high need for a more robust refugee health clinic."

Kathryn Friesen, CSS

Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) depend on their sponsors to find a family doctor and other primary health care providers. Charchuk, whose research focused on PSRs, says many sponsors went looking for Arabic-speaking doctors even before their families arrived, and some spent countless hours helping families make and keep appointments. Other sponsors, by contrast, provided very little support. Even those with the best intentions flounder at times, due in part to the complexity of the system. What's more, news about available services (such as free screening for refugee children at the University of Alberta Department of Dentistry) doesn't always reach those who could benefit.

Adding to the complexity, refugee medical coverage cuts made in 2012 were recently reinstated following a successful Supreme Court challenge. While welcome, that change left many health care providers confused about what is covered and how to access coverage. CSS knows which providers are set up to claim federal coverage and sends their clients there, but many private sponsors don't know which doctors and pharmacists are adept in serving newcomers. As a result, some privately sponsored families are paying for (or avoiding) treatments they cannot afford but could be receiving at no cost.

"Many refugees may leave their health concerns as they try to deal with finding permanent housing, employment and education, so it's also important that health care and settlement services are integrated together."

Rhianna Charchuk, MSc, Global Health

AHS initially set up a service for PSRs at the Edmonton Centre for Newcomers, including some basic technology as well as phone connections for interpretation.

"Although some families benefited from this, many private sponsorship groups already had connections in the health care system, or lived too far from the clinic to make it practical to use this service," says the EMCN's Suzanne Gross. "When AHS decided to close the New Canadians' Clinic and replace it by building capacity among PCNs, the idea of having a service for PSRs also went by the wayside. We are working with AHS to find the best way forward to support the interconnected and complex health and mental health needs of refugees."

Frontline workers say many family physicians have neither the time nor the global health expertise to probe refugees' health issues and offer holistic care. "It's not simply understanding their potential health concerns (e.g. malnutrition, infectious diseases) but using an appropriate translator and offering culturally appropriate, refugee-centred care," Charchuk says.

"A 13-year-old newcomer is having major surgery at the Stollery on Thursday. Is someone available to translate for the family on Thursday?"

Posted on Edmonton Refugee Volunteers website

Even though many of Edmonton's family physicians speak Arabic, refugees often end up in health care offices where no one understands them. Women giving birth under unfamiliar labour and delivery procedures, for example, keenly feel the dearth of Arabic-speaking women in gynecology. Language barriers tend to exacerbate gaps and wait times, frustrating Syrians accustomed to a system that, although fee-for-service, gave them quicker access to family physicians and specialists.

"A pharmacist at Westmount speaks Arabic, and we managed to find a female gynecologist, but most OBs are in teams, and you get what you get—man or woman. That's a hard thing for these moms."

Michelle Young, North Glenora Refugee Response Group

AHS operates a language line with telephone access to translators in multiple languages, but staff often don't know about the resource, assume sign language will suffice or prefer an in-person translator. What's more, not all family physicians have invested in the interpretation line. Individuals stepping into the breach to translate include settlement workers already stretched thin by the influx, volunteers and family members. One Syrian family interviewed by Rhianna Charchuk said a 14-year-old was called to hospital to translate during a relative's a labour and delivery – hardly an appropriate situation.

“Yes, we no longer have the Syrian flow, but you regularly have refugees who are survivors of torture, who have tropical medical concerns—there's a whole whack of stuff that's refugee specific. Multicultural Health Brokers tries to pick up the slack, but it's not the same as having an actual specialized clinic.”

John Biles, IRCC

A growing chorus is advocating not only a return to a dedicated clinic for new Canadians, but a more robust and well-funded clinic that serves every refugee, regardless of sponsorship. As possible models, they point to Calgary's Mosaic Refugee Health Clinic, which provides wraparound primary care and social services for all refugees during their first two years; and to the Boyle McCauley Health Centre, which provides holistic care in Edmonton's inner city.

“We have a very compelling vision of a community health centre that is very much designed by the people for the people who are most marginalized. It would hopefully have workers who are very familiar with common health and mental health challenges and include community development as part of health. And whatever we learn would be used to inform others, including government, so they too become people-centred in their approach.”

Yvonne Chiu, Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative

Advocates also recommend changes in billing to encourage physicians to spend more than the regularly allotted appointment time with refugees due to the complexity of their needs as well as language and cultural differences. In the meantime, COSI is developing a list of family physicians with expertise in (and a heart for) global health in hope of matching more refugees with appropriate care.

Suggestions

The following recommendations are based on conversations with Syrian refugees and service providers, research, review of the evidence and best practices across Canada.

Specialized Refugee Health Care

Experts recommend the following specialized services for refugee patients in the first year upon arrival:

- A broad base of health and mental health services (primary care, community and settlement services) for at least a year, plus assistance transitioning into the Alberta health care system
- Providers with specialized training in refugee health and culturally competent care
- Catch-up on immunizations and diagnosis of communicable diseases
- Culturally sensitive health care for women (including family planning)
- Immediate care for pregnant women
- Timely referrals for emergency dental care and other acute care needs
- Information on federal and provincial health benefits readily accessible to providers

Health Care Providers

Even in the absence of a standardized system to support all refugees with accessing primary health care, the following key recommendations can improve care:

- Family physicians and general practitioners who serve refugees book longer appointments and complete a comprehensive, evidence-based refugee health assessment
- Providers ensure professionally trained medical translators are available
- Providers and their staff know the federal and provincial health benefit programs
- Providers work to understand and address the cultural and other barriers that prevent refugees from accessing primary health care services

Decision Makers

Decision makers need to support ongoing communication and collaboration of program and service delivery, drawing from successful models of cross-sectoral collaboration (e.g., health, education, settlement, employment). The current model is not working well; those on the ground experience challenges with services and programs that decision makers perceive to be working well. Some key recommended actions:

- Evaluate the Alberta Health Services approach to interpretation, both by telephone and in person
- Make it easy for health care providers to get information on federal/provincial health benefits
- Improve access to those benefits

Settlement Agencies

The holistic outreach support team used by EMCN and partners to assess the settlement needs of Syrian refugees was able to actively identify gaps in housing, employment, education, language competency and health. They also found services and supports, and even booked appointments, to fill those gaps. Building on this model, recommendations include the following:

- When booking any health-related appointment, ensure an interpreter will be available for the refugee
- Improve and increase outreach support resources
- Organize training sessions to offer private sponsors information about refugee health care and access to services



YOUTH READY TO WORK

Action for Healthy Communities hosts workshops for new immigrant and refugee youth between the ages of 14-24 focused on building employment readiness skills that will create opportunities and propel them towards successful integration. Youth learn everything from how to search for jobs and write a résumé to preparing for interviews and the first day on the job.

6. Mental Health

Mental health concerns are surfacing as daily life settles somewhat for Syrian refugees, and as they become more able to express their feelings in English. Both youth and adults report nightmares and other signs of post-traumatic stress. Other strains on mental health include isolation from familiar support systems, loneliness, unemployment, worry about finances, loss of identity, shifts in roles (including gender roles) and parenting in two cultures.

45% of Syrian refugee children displayed symptoms of PTSD and/or depression.

Fatima Al Sayah, Edmonton Refugee Volunteers, presenting at April 22, 2016 Immigration and Settlement Learning Day hosted by the City of Edmonton

Addressing post-traumatic stress and other mental health needs is key to healthy resettlement and long-term social inclusion. The accompanying snapshots attest to the value of addressing newcomers' mental health needs soon after they arrive, whether through art, equine therapy, peer support or other means. Yet sponsors and service providers alike report difficulty in connecting Syrian refugees with appropriate mental health services. Some newcomers are reluctant to seek help, but an even greater deterrent is the lack of available mental health specialists, particularly in Arabic. The Syrian Family Support Centre reports waits of three months or more.

"Connecting with mental health resources has been a challenge. It's something that doesn't seem to be talked about as much in their culture, and that emotional side is difficult without the language. Plus, it was difficult to find Arabic-speaking mental health resources."

Michelle Young, North Glenora Refugee Response Group

Edmonton Refugee Volunteers co-founder Fatima Al Sayah, a University of Alberta health researcher by day, has accompanied many newcomers to medical appointments and says doctors are not doing mental health screening, despite the fact that screening is recommended for high risk groups. Even when the need is known and resources are available, she adds, "navigating the system is very difficult." She advocates screening all refugees for mental health concerns at a dedicated clinic with expertise in global health and greatly expanding the availability of group therapy.

"Refugees' risk of mental health disorders is double or triple, some say 10 times, more than average. And it affects the whole family, so there are not just health care costs, but social support costs. So the repercussions of not addressing mental health are huge."

Fatima Al Sayah, Edmonton Refugee Volunteers

There's a growing call for expanded and coordinated mental health support as part of a multifaceted newcomer clinic. Beyond that, the members of COSI urge our entire community to take responsibility for creating the environment newcomers need to recover from trauma and tap into their own resilience.

The Adaptation and Development After Persecution and Trauma (ADAPT) model conceptualized by Derrick Silove of University of South Wales offers a rubric that is showing promise as a holistic approach. In a 2013 *Intervention* article, Silove observes that mass conflict fundamentally disrupts five core psychosocial pillars: safety/security, bonds/networks, justice, roles/identities, existential meaning. Helping survivors repair those pillars requires attention in all spheres, including work, individual, family, community, programming and policy.

"For refugee populations, in particular, mental health should be a key focus and should be conceptualized not in narrow, individualistic terms, but as how as a society we respond to and repair psychosocial pillars that are violated by mass trauma."

Monique Nutter, submission to the IRCC

The AAISA study of resettlement experiences also suggests a wide-angle approach, challenging all systems, agencies and groups working with refugees to adopt a “trauma-informed lens.” That is, equipping frontline workers to address refugees’ trauma (before coming but also during settlement and integration) in an environment of safety, trust, collaboration and choice.

“Positive mental health is the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity.”

Public Health Agency of Canada

The time is ripe to address the mental health needs of newcomers. We have gained more than 2,000 Syrian neighbours with potential to contribute greatly to our city if supported as envisioned by the ADAPT model. What’s more, Edmonton is just beginning to operationalize a new, collaboratively created Community Mental Health Action Plan. The plan identifies diversity as a guiding principle and pledges that, “an appreciation of, and responsiveness to, diverse populations and cultures will be the basis of engagement and intervention approaches.” Noting that intervention makes a difference in 80% of diagnosed cases, the plan, “aims to ensure all residents in our community have access to mental health supports when and where they need them.”

“Just over 20% of us are new immigrants, and more than 1500 refugees have settled here since November 2015, bringing both the richness of cultural diversity and the challenge of ensuring new citizens are connected to mental health services. This is particularly important for those who may have suffered from trauma related to transitions, or political or social violence in their country of origin.”

Community Mental Health Action Plan,
Edmonton & Area

Just-In-Time Learning

Fatima Al Sayah, co-founder of Edmonton Refugee Volunteers, pulled together an expert team that developed and presented training packages on how refugees’ traumatic experiences impact mental health. Intended first to equip volunteers within their own Facebook group, the training also proved valuable for private sponsors, ESL teachers and volunteers working with Syrians students in the University of Alberta’s President’s Award program. The group hoped to present to refugees but did not have access to the families’ names and contact information. “We can’t reach out to people who probably need us the most,” Al Sayah says.

Suggestions

- Create a centralized mental health clinic for newcomers with community-based flexibility of practice.
- Routinely screen the mental health of incoming refugees.
- Expand culturally appropriate therapy, both for individuals and in groups.
- Employ a trauma-informed lens in settlement services and in broader society.
- Intentionally address newcomer needs in rolling out the Community Mental Health Action Plan.

SNAPSHOT 8

USING HORSES AS THERAPEUTIC TOOLS

Dozens of Syrian youth who were exhibiting significant trauma symptoms at school participated in an equine-assisted psychotherapy program coordinated by EMCN in partnership with Remuda Horsemanship and Blarney Stones in 2016 and 2017. Spending time with specially trained horses and therapists helped many of the youth begin to heal from experiences such as war, refugee camp, abuse, loss of family members and total life disruption.

Each youth had two or more opportunities to work with horses. They participated in exercises as simple as figuring out how to approach a horse and put a halter on. For some, the sessions were coupled with talk therapy and involved other family members. The following results were seen after two individual or group sessions:

- Immediate relaxation and calmness in nervous system and behaviour, 90%
- Increased self-confidence, 85-95%
- More connection to Canada, 50%
- Enhanced self-care (grooming, keeping room clean), 100%
- Reduced aggression in school, 75%
- Improved communication and relationship with parents, 80%
- Further along in the grieving process, 95%
- Increased connection to self/others, 95%



Photo courtesy of EMCN and Gretchen Lyons

DOZENS OF SYRIAN YOUTH PARTICIPATED IN AN EQUINE-ASSISTED PSYCHOTHERAPY PROGRAM

One 12-year-old originally from Chile offers a case in point. Before undergoing therapy, his life involved frequent fights, regular trips to the principal's office, numerous parent-teacher conferences and a three-day suspension. Then, over two years, he participated in play and horse therapy. His younger brother also attended horse therapy, and his parents engaged in couple's therapy focused on making healthy choices in parenting and in their relationship. As the boy began to do better at home and school, the therapy shifted from intensive to intermittent. He now recognizes his triggers and is able to self-regulate in a relaxed and healthy way. His teachers are happy to say there have been no conflicts or issues this year.

When a relationship is formed that taps the bond between animals and humans, there is real potential to foster self-understanding and emotional growth.



SNAPSHOTS 9 & 10

NATURAL LEADERS: TESTING THE ADAPT MODEL

Syrians invited to a stakeholder meeting in late 2016 talked about ways newcomers can provide mutual support for others struggling with mental well-being. The University of Alberta department of educational psychology teamed up with the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op and CSS (with funding from the Alberta Ministry of Labour) to test the ADAPT model as a tool for equipping community members to do exactly that.

Newcomers from Syria who have emerged as natural leaders volunteered to test the model.

Eleven of them participated in training workshops, and nine continued on to practice what they had learned. Using the psychosocial pillars named in the ADAPT model as discussion starters, they initiate conversations with groups of fellow newcomers.

Besides providing a safe way to break the silence about mental health needs, the conversations are beginning to suggest solutions. Researchers are now seeking funding to expand the circles and to create a how-to manual.



HURTING. BY MANAR SHAKDOUH,
NEWCOMER FROM SYRIA

EDMONTON ART GALLERY: OPENING DOORS TO ART & ARTISTRY

Art has proven value as an antidote to life disruptions—and as a way to explore a new culture. Yet for newcomers struggling to resettle, art may seem an unaffordable luxury. Knowing that, the Art Gallery of Alberta (AGA) has welcomed various partnerships that invite Syrian refugees to experience the gallery at no cost.

On Dec. 4, 2016, AGA teamed up with the Bredin Centre, EMCN and the City of Edmonton to host an event that began as “for Syrians only,” but through thoughtful planning, ultimately welcomed all newcomers. More than 400 attended. Besides enjoying music from Global Choir and Bent Arrow, they had opportunities to tour the galleries and participate in crafts.

Syrian youth were proud to be among the volunteers. What’s more, the works on display that night included art created by five Syrian youth who were mentored by another international artist, Emmanuel Osahor. Using funds provided by a BMO 1st Art! Award, Emmanuel brought the youth to the gallery to create art to explore their journeys and dreams.

In a similar spirit, Assist Community Services Centre and the Institute for Canadian Citizenship (ICC) partnered with the AGA to host Ahlan Canada, one of several ICC events across Canada to welcome refugees from Syria. Interpreters included Arabic-speaking volunteers who have benefited from reduced-rate cultural experiences through an ICC program for newly minted Canadians.

Canada Council for the Arts and Sun Life Financial also funded free gallery admission for Syrian refugees, which the AGA continued for a time after funding ended.

“Art is such an amazing way to be able to express yourself in a healthy way.”

Emmanuel Osahor, University of Alberta art student from Nigeria

7. Family Reconfiguration

For many refugees from Syria, the stress of resettlement is heightened by unfamiliar gender roles, discipline practices and other social norms. Frontline agencies are helping numerous families work through such issues as spousal disputes, parent-child power struggles and accusations of abuse. Many others may be struggling without support.

Although every family is unique, patterns have emerged. Many children are learning English and cuing into Canadian norms faster than their parents. Roles have shifted as children translate for the family, question parenting styles and in some cases work while their elders remain unemployed. Men accustomed to being family breadwinners may feel emasculated, particularly as their wives discover rights they did not have in Syria.

As with mental health, there are months-long waiting lists to see family therapists. There's also concern about affordability as families reach the end of their first year and lose federal mental health coverage.

Agencies are doing what they can to fill gaps. For example, CSS has offered the help of two culturally sensitive staff therapists, with interpreters, to the Syrian Family Resource Centre. The centre is also employing an Arabic-speaking psychologist to explore entrepreneurship with men in hope of building the trust needed to address more personal topics, such as parenting in two cultures. Multicultural Health Brokers are working with Child and Family Services to intervene with families where children are considered at risk and to analyze the circumstances that brought them into care.

Given the many stresses on family life that resettlement imposes, more support is needed to ensure that family bonds stay (or grow) strong.

"Programs seem to focus on certain members of the family, but many people overlook what's happening inside the family, intergenerationally. There's very little to preserve the wellness of the family."

Yvonne Chiu, Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative

Suggestions

- Greater access to culturally appropriate crisis response for families
- Attention to the circumstances behind family discord
- Plain language Arabic resources and interpretation services for people going through violence
- Programs focused on intergenerational family wellness
- Programs to empower women within the Syrian culture
- Division of settlement support among family members rather than one lump sum

SNAPSHOT 11

EDMONTON IMMIGRANT SERVICES ASSOCIATION: ONSITE SUPPORT FOR YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILIES

Go to where the people are. With that philosophy, the Edmonton Immigrant Services Association (EISA) places settlement practitioners in schools and public libraries serving large numbers of newcomers. In 71 locations around Edmonton (and growing), newcomer students and their families have an onsite advocate and connector to find out what they need—not only to learn but to live—and point them to the nearest resources.

Practitioners in schools get to know each newcomer family and serve as a bridge between staff, students and parents. When language barriers arise, they either interpret or call in a colleague who can, greatly reducing wait times for interpretation. When students become frustrated by the barrage of unfamiliar expectations, language and culture, practitioners offer a listening ear and refer to other resources when needed. When newcomer parents miss interviews or fail to help with homework, practitioners find out why and help staff and families reach an understanding. Perhaps the parents can't read the appointment forms, for example, or maybe their children went to boarding schools in Syria and didn't need homework help.

After nearly a decade of operation, EISA recently expanded its presence to 55 schools, up from 12. It also has staff in 13 Edmonton-and-area libraries. Aware that 75% of the Syrian newcomers were under age 14, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) provided even more funds for the school program expansion than EISA requested, says Settlement Services manager Oliver Kamau. "Everybody was impacted by the huge number that came in a very short time, and IRCC realized we need to get big on this."

"Instead of expecting people to go to agencies, we go to them. We're actually just moving our desks and offices and making it easier for new families to access us."

Oliver Kamau,
Manager, Settlement Services, EISA



A BRIDGE. HAYDER ABED, ARABIC-SPEAKING SETTLEMENT PRACTITIONER (SCHOOLS & LIBRARIES) FROM EISA, IS ABLE TO SUPPORT NEWCOMERS IN PART BECAUSE HE KNOWS MANY PEOPLE IN AND OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY.

EISA reaches out to newcomers in other ways as well. The agency holds information sessions in schools and libraries on everything from living on low income to renters' rights and responsibilities, school expectations and parenting in Canada. EISA also leads after-school and summer programs in 10 schools. The programs, which balance recreation with academics, attract mainstream as well as newcomer students. In three high schools with high numbers of Syrian students, it also offers a "Bridge to Success" program that provides academic and mentoring support as well as summer camps.

Dozens of other schools could benefit from having in-school settlement practitioners, Oliver says. "We're encouraging two-way conversation, so both parents and staff become better informed and newcomer families are better served. When we have a presence in a school, the principal sees it as a huge advantage."

8. Education

The federal government funds language training for parents, but for children that responsibility rests with the provincial government. A handful of Edmonton schools have enough staff to provide separate classrooms for English language learners who need intensive support, but those schools could not accommodate all the Syrian students who arrived. Large clusters of students enrolled in schools that did not have budgets and staffing for separate classes. In those schools, newcomers spent much of the day in regular classes with students their age, even though many had fallen behind in their schooling and knew little English. Typically, the classrooms were led by teachers with little specific training in how to help students learn English.

“Sadly, Alberta has almost no K-12 ESL training, and yet we are a very multicultural province. It makes no sense.”

Anna Kirova, University of Alberta education professor

In most cities, each school board has a centralized registration system that works closely with school-based settlement workers to support newcomer students and their families, says IRCC’s John Biles. “In Edmonton, the Catholic board has a centre newcomers get funneled through, but the public board does not. Every principal is king or queen in his own castle, so you cannot take a system approach to this. There’s incredible duplication and disparity, with multiple programs in one school and another school that has lots of newcomers but no programs.”

Edmonton Public Schools did hire more Arabic-speaking intercultural consultants to join its mobile teams of ESL consultants, mental-health therapists and social workers, who travel from school to school. In addition, IRCC has expanded funding for settlement workers in schools (see Snapshot 11). Yet many students and parents were (and are) floundering. The situation is especially critical for teens in catch-up mode. They risk not completing high school before age 19, when funding for high school stops. COSI and others are advocating for a lift of the age cap, so newcomers can afford to complete high school.

One in three Alberta students 13 and older will be foreign born by 2024.



FOR TEACHERS

Free webinars created by U of A education professors Sophie Yohani and Anna Kirova offers ideas and resources for teaching refugee students whose experiences may include trauma, interrupted schooling and learning in another language. See welcominglearning.ualberta.ca.

“The 18-year-old in our family is going to Centre High because he aged out of the regular school system, and basically is just learning English. We want him to stay in school as long as possible, but it’s a real trade-off because he is also one of the few in the family who could go to work now. It’s really scary, actually, thinking of what’s going to happen.”

Elizabeth Nash, North Glenora Refugee Response Group

Both IRCC and COSI are seeking ways to spur more language learning outside of the classroom, both to meet immediate needs among newcomer youth and in hope of inspiring system change. Near-term plans include a prototype after-school homework club staffed by volunteer teacher-mentors specifically trained for the work. It’s hoped that the project will attract retired teachers as well as recent graduates wanting to break into ESL teaching.

Embracing Youth

The Out of School Time Collaborative, whose members provide programming for youth of many cultures, ran a summer program specifically for Syrian youth that attracted more than 200 participants. Based on that key success, REACH submitted a larger proposal to provide after-school supports as well. Others offering programs to foster identity and belonging among Syrian youth include Action for Healthy Communities, IFSSA, the Syrian Family Support Centre and Concrete Theatre.

Suggestions

- Centralize registration of newcomer students and ensure equitable services.
- When placing students, take into account their actual academic level.
- Ensure all schools are equipped to meet the linguistic and integration needs of incoming students.
- In schools with many newly arrived students, collaborate with agencies to host parent-driven, facilitated discussion evenings and to provide holistic support.
- Seek community-based cultural navigators and therapists to support children and youth struggling to engage socially and/or academically.
- Expand school-based settlement services in schools in collaboration with internal multicultural supports.
- Remove or raise the age cap for students to complete high school tuition-free.
- Train teachers and volunteers to teach inquiry-based English learning to children and youth.
- Offer out-of-school and summer programs that integrate English learning.
- Provide more academic supports and alternative learning opportunities for refugee children and youth.

SNAPSHOT 12

SHARED WISDOM: COFFEE CLUB DRAWS PARENTS IN

One of the elementary schools in Edmonton that enrolled a large number of Syrian students saw some of those newcomers struggling to integrate and asked EMCN for additional support. In interactions with the children, parent engagement came up as a way to help the students feel more at home at the school. Cultural norms were keeping at least one mother away. How could the team reach out to particular families without singling anyone out?

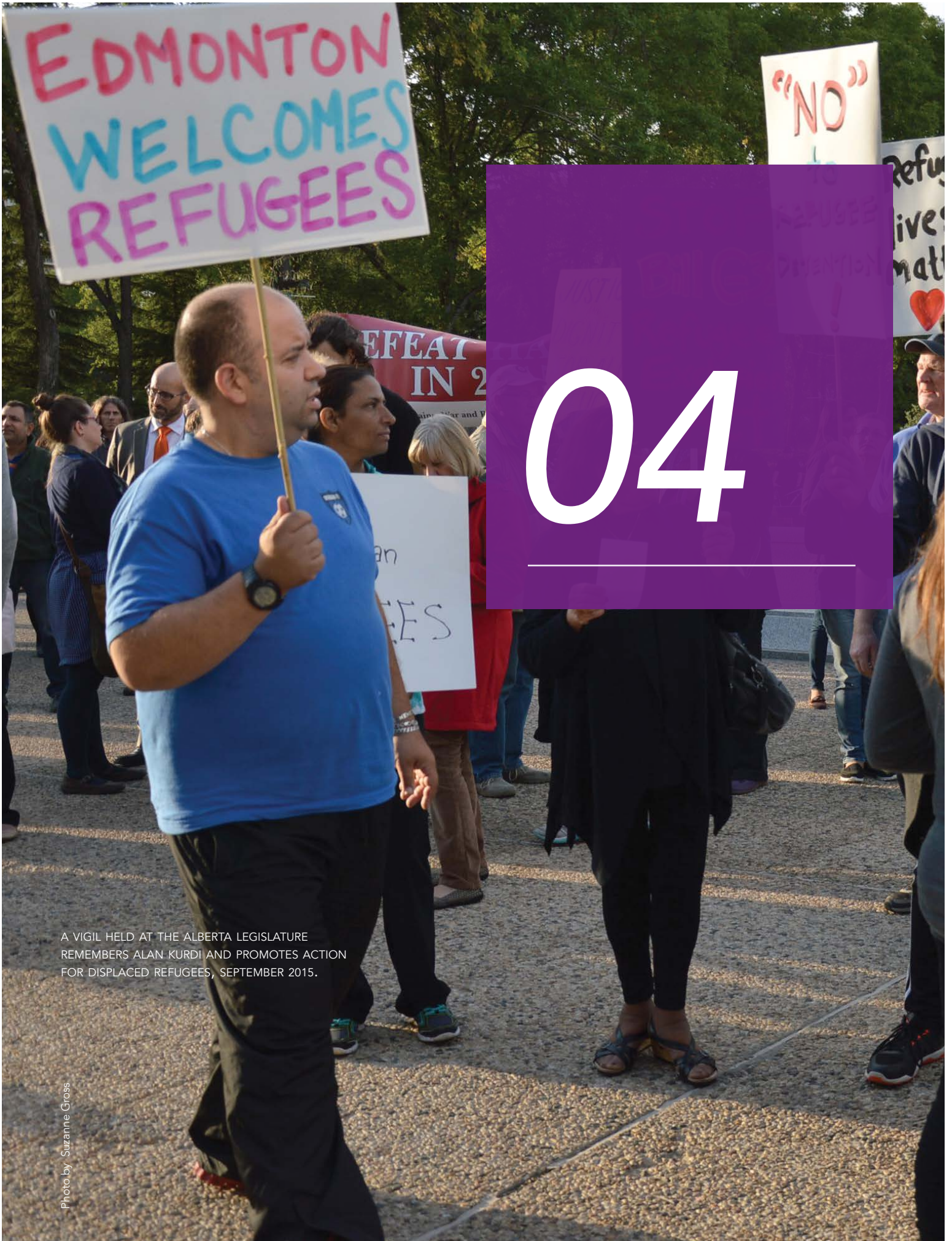
The idea emerged of creating a Friday morning Coffee Club where various topics could be explored. EMCN staff member Mouna Esmaeel put the wheels in motion and invited all the Syrian mothers with children at the school to attend. Nine mothers came to the first meeting, including those who had not been engaged before. They are mothers to 32 students in the school system, elementary through high school.

The meeting was facilitated in such a way that issues facing all participants could be put on the table and explored and prioritized together. The issue of children's behaviours—both at home and at school—came up. As parents shared the struggles they were facing with their youth, Mouna asked, "What would happen if you assigned your children chores and gave them small rewards for their good work?" The mothers considered this, and many said they would give it a try at home.

Just a few days later, one child excitedly shared with the principal that she now has chores at home and will get a small shopping spree at Walmart as a reward for doing them. She was proud, happy and much more focused in her learning as a result of this small change. A change that emerged as mothers learned together to support and manage their families in the new context of Canada.



REFUGEE MOTHERS AND CHILDREN GATHER FOR COFFEE CLUB. SOME FACES HAVE BEEN OBSCURED TO PROTECT THE IDENTITIES OF THE PARTICIPANTS.



EDMONTON
WELCOMES
REFUGEES

"NO"

Refugee
lives
matter

DEFEAT
IN 2

04

A VIGIL HELD AT THE ALBERTA LEGISLATURE REMEMBERS ALAN KURDI AND PROMOTES ACTION FOR DISPLACED REFUGEES, SEPTEMBER 2015.

Photo by Suzanne Gross

SYSTEMS VIEW: WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

The arrival of so many Syrian refugees so fast spurred innovative thinking while also highlighting weak points in settlement systems. Among those involved, there's an appetite to learn from recent experience and improve Edmonton's capacity to welcome and integrate newcomers.

What aspects of our approach to settlement are ripe for renewal? What's worthy of carrying forward? The following pages offer observations and suggestions based on conversations with families, volunteers and service providers. This section focuses on the following systemic issues and needs:

1. Inter-agency coordination
2. Client-centred service
3. Cultural navigation
4. Volunteer mobilization
5. Comprehensive tracking & support
6. Racism
7. Community inclusion

Syrians as 'Special'

Some newcomers from Syria are resented for the fact that they received certain benefits that other refugees have not. Besides the fact that the federal government forgave travel loans for GARs arriving from Syria between specified dates, the groundswell of compassion attracted donations earmarked specifically for refugees from that country, including computers, bus passes and housing subsidies. Inequitable treatment has created divisions among Syrian refugees and between Syrians and other newcomers who cannot access that same generosity. Some have been heard to say, whether in jest or somewhat cynically, "Can I be Syrian today?" It's an unfortunate situation exacerbated by the fact that nearly everyone, including those receiving more benefits than the norm, is struggling to make ends meet.

"Settlement is built on relationships. Refugees need to connect to their own cultural group, to other agencies, to the mainstream. No one person or agency can do it all."

Ese Ejebe, CSS

Lessons Borrowed—and Yet to Be Learned

As the body responsible to fund refugee services across the country, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has a bird's-eye perspective on how Edmonton welcomed the Syrian influx. John Biles, assistant director of settlement for the region, notes that some ideas born here, such as community-based daycare, are now spreading elsewhere. Here are ideas implemented elsewhere that he suggests adding to Edmonton's toolkit:

- Port-of-entry services at the airport during times of major influx, so someone is always on hand in case of unscheduled arrivals
- A newcomer health care clinic, as in Calgary and elsewhere
- Centralized registration of children in the school system
- Language instructors who go to where the people are
- Concerted volunteer coordination that matches every incoming family with a volunteer
- Triaged case management that matches services to family circumstances and ensures needs keep being met in community

1. Inter-agency Coordination

With many individuals, agencies and policymakers playing overlapping roles in welcoming Syrian refugees to Edmonton, coordination and communication have proven excruciatingly complex. The AAISA study of service providers and needs across the province puts it this way: “Communication and information sharing is a strength mobilized by organizations to meet refugee needs, but also a challenge.”

That’s certainly true in Edmonton. Extremely busy people are dedicating significant time and expertise to sharing key information and providing collaborative services—and yet gaps, overlaps and service inequities persist. For refugees and their support systems, confusion and frustration result.

“Everyone is doing the same thing, and in the bigger picture there’s a waste of resources. A lot of people, by the way, get super confused by that. There has to be better integration and better communication.”

Fatima Al Sayah, Edmonton Refugee Volunteers

Edmonton has gained two key umbrella organizations since the Syrian immigration began: ELIP and COSI. Others such as AAISA, M.A.P.S. Alberta and the Newcomer Mapping Network are also doing essential work in analyzing the extent to which services are meeting lived needs. Numerous other research and integration efforts are also afoot. With wise leadership and willingness to set aside organizational agendas for the greater good, there is hope for greater coordination in future.

“In Edmonton, you have decision makers at the table, alongside frontline and volunteers. It’s a very effective way of galvanizing people in a short time. I find Edmonton to be incredibly resilient in that way.”

Mohamed Huque, IFSSA

Suggestions

- Create a map of service and program strengths and niche expertise and stay alert to opportunities for strong inter-agency action and referrals.
- Review, align and support the work of umbrella bodies.
- Provide sustainable funding for settlement coordination.
- Encourage and reward mutuality among service providers.
- Tie funding for settlement services to coordinated multi-agency planning and service.
- Maintain a comprehensive resource listing that’s widely available online and in print.

Settlement Resource Guides

Who’s doing what to welcome refugees? It’s a challenge to keep tabs, especially when agencies are flexing to meet expanded needs. Below are some of the resource listings used by settlement workers in the Edmonton region. Most can be accessed online by typing in key words.

- **Newcomer’s Guide**
City of Edmonton publication in multiple languages, including Arabic
- **Welcome to Edmonton**
An overview of supports and services in Edmonton for newcomers by M.A.P.S., CSS and IFSSA
- **Edmonton Social Atlas, Newcomer Resources Section**
M.A.P.S.
- **Tough Times Handbook**
Produced by 211 Alberta and Canadian Mental Health Association Edmonton
- **Resources for Newcomers to Canada**
211 (one-page list for Edmonton region)
- **Refugeealberta.ca**
AAISA website for refugees, volunteers and organizations

2. Client-centred Service

The AAISA review of settlement needs across Alberta identifies “client-centred service” that is “responsive to the needs of refugees” as a key area deserving attention. AAISA’s resettlement study, which is based on newcomers’ lived experiences, puts it this way: “The ‘one size fits all’ model is unlikely to be the best approach to resettlement programming.”

Various settlement agencies have been making the shift from funder-driven to client-centred support of newcomers. EMCN, for example, follows Ten Principles of Holistic Practice that grew out of a client-driven process of goal-setting and planning, resulting in an approach that is fundamentally outcomes-based and client-focused. The Syrian Family Support Centre also focuses on newcomers’ well-being and abilities rather than the requirements or expectations of a settlement system. Those and other agencies are proving the value of forming trusting relationships, focusing on assets as well as needs and inviting co-leadership in everything from case planning to choosing a home.

“What keeps newcomers like ourselves engaged in services and with agencies is usefulness. Some agencies have preconceived notions about who an immigrant is, what their story must be, and what they are in need of. They barely take the time to listen to each individual story.”

Couple quoted in *Engaging Newcomers: Perspectives from Newcomers and Service Providers*, June 2016. ASSIST Community Services Centre, Multicultural Health Brokers, and M.A.P.S.

Being intentionally client-centred heightens the likelihood that services align well with newcomers’ daily reality. In this environment, refugees with particular challenges (including LGBTQ, seniors and those living with physical and mental disabilities, post-traumatic stress or family discord) have a greater chance of being heard and appropriately supported. Individuals nested in this approach, whether serving or served, report that solutions rooted in community blossom and grow more vigorously than those imported from outside.

Suggestions

- Create opportunities for agencies to share best practices for client-centred service.
- Examine and, where necessary, reorient systems to be more client-centred.
- Make sure those with particular challenges can easily find sensitive and culturally appropriate services.
- Expand the use of cultural navigators or brokers (see next section).



SUPPORTING LGBTQ NEWCOMERS

Seeing an unmet need, EMCN obtained funding for a settlement counsellor to support LGBTQ newcomers. The group gathers at the Nina Haggerty Centre on Friday evenings and participates in community events such as the Pride Parade.

3. Cultural Navigation

Cultural navigators (or brokers) can be effective vehicles for providing client-centred service. Typically rooted in the same culture as those they serve, the brokers or navigators help newcomers bridge cultural divides and navigate unfamiliar systems. Because navigators work with multiple newcomer families, they are also able to identify systemic issues needing attention.

Syrian families attest to the benefit of being enveloped in consistent support from someone who knows both the settlement system and their homeland culture. The journey maps on the following page, informed by the lived experience of Syrian refugees, illustrate the important role cultural navigators play in connecting and supporting individuals, families, services and the broader community.

Already, Edmonton has excellent examples of this approach in action. Multicultural Health Brokers, REACH, IFSSA, EMCN and other centres employ natural leaders who have lived the refugee experience. These brokers or navigators walk with newcomers, helping them access services, bond with others who share their culture and bridge outward to the wider community. Agencies, in turn, use the knowledge and insight gathered by these outreach workers to shape client-centred supports and programming and pinpoint the issues most urgently needing advocacy.

Agencies that employ cultural navigators say there is pent-up need for more. “If we had added capacity, we would put it into more outreach workers, to provide that support,” says IFSSA CEO Mohamed Huque. “It’s a long-term investment. If you put in that time initially at the early stage, it allows people to get on their feet quicker and prevents issues later on.”

The COSI model of social integration offers a useful framework for client-centred service that employs cultural navigators or brokers. As that model stresses, caring connections within and beyond cultures are essential to effective settlement.

About 6,000 (or 7%) of Edmonton’s seniors do not speak English or French and may have particular difficulty navigating systems to address income security, housing, transportation, mental health and social isolation, according to the 2015 study entitled The Age of Wisdom: Giving Voice to Edmonton’s Immigrant Seniors and Identifying Their Needs.

“It’s not just the basics of settlement that families need; they need holistic support that is culturally relevant.”

Monique Nutter, Multicultural Health Brokers, at COSI

Suggestions

- Create opportunities for agencies to share best practices for employing cultural navigators/brokers.
- Fund more cultural navigators/brokers.
- Provide mechanisms for navigators/brokers to advocate on behalf of those they serve.



JOURNEY MAPS: THE NEWCOMER EXPERIENCE

These maps, informed by the lived experience of Syrian refugees, illustrate the important roles cultural navigators play in addressing the challenges newcomers face.

4. Volunteer Mobilization

Numerous agencies involved in settling Syrian refugees lament the fact that they did not make use of many who wanted to volunteer. EMCN started a volunteer inventory that quickly grew to nearly 1,000, but had just one coordinator to vet all those names. CSS was too busy meeting refugees' needs to do the intake, screening and training its policies require for volunteers working directly with clients, which most were hoping to do. The City of Edmonton created an information portal directing volunteers to CSS, EMCN and elsewhere, but that simply added to the overload. Nor was any central body supporting would-be Good Samaritans, such as the woman keen to start a playground meet-up with nearby Syrian families. Frustration ensued, and opportunities to tap the groundswell of empathy were lost.

"There was an opportunity created and we didn't change our systems, which I think is a mistake on all our parts. We could have brought people into the fold, but we didn't because we didn't adapt."

Erick Ambtman, EMCN

IRCC shares those regrets. "From the beginning, we wanted to match every Syrian family with a Canadian family," says Assistant Director John Biles. "We said to the agencies, 'Ask us for funds to hire volunteer coordinators.' People twiddled around the edges, but most cities were super reluctant to take this on holus bolus. I think a lot of them felt overwhelmed." Exceptions include Winnipeg, where settlement agencies reached outward for the expertise to onboard volunteers, he adds.

Some grassroots entities sprang up, including Edmonton Refugee Volunteers (ERF). Built as an informal Facebook group, ERF does not have a formal application system with police checks, although it does vet people informally by asking them to volunteer in other roles before working with families. Perhaps its success in using social media to speedily involve volunteers offers some ideas worth considering. "I think we underutilize technology," says co-founder Fatima Al Sayah. "There could be an electronic registry where you submit all the paperwork online, and are trained and ready if needs come up."

"One of the best things that could happen is volunteer organization: have a list of volunteers you're able to dispatch, which is exactly what we did. But to be honest, this is a lot of work."

Julie Kamal, Edmonton Refugee Volunteers

Creating and maintaining a massive volunteer database in anticipation of future need is no small feat in a culture where people move on both geographically and in their interests. Yet many agree that more must be done to improve our community's ability to match large volumes of volunteers with needs in short order, whether specifically for settlement or for a broader range of needs.

Suggestions

- Enhance collaboration among existing volunteer coordinators.
- Make savvy use of technology for volunteer registration, vetting and matching.
- Create volunteer fairs and other opportunities for service providers to recruit volunteers.
- Expand Alberta Culture and Tourism's Volunteer Screening Program.
- Task a central community-wide body with volunteer screening and referrals.
- Review volunteer screening and management protocols with an eye to reducing barriers.
- Increase support for grassroots volunteering.
- Allow more time before refugees arrive to onboard volunteers as well as staff.

5. Comprehensive Tracking & Support

Refugees arriving from Syria are receiving widely varied levels of support. While many families are nested in the care of capable and connected sponsorship teams, others tend to be receiving less assistance unless they happen to connect with an agency or volunteer dedicated to that work.

“We all have a role to play, but a lot who could benefit are not benefiting.”

Michelle LaRue, ASSIST Community Services Centre

As the lone agency contracted to deliver the federal Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) to GARs in Edmonton, CSS faced a massive task when large numbers of Syrians arrived rapidly with unexpected levels of need. Settling into homes, enrolling children in schools and making their first shopping forays, many families needed more help than CSS staff and volunteers could provide. But other providers did not know which GARs were living within their service areas, due in part to privacy concerns. As a result, word of mouth has become a primary vehicle for finding refugees in need, leaving agencies and volunteers to wonder who else is floundering due to lack of support. A common refrain is, “We could have done more to help, but we didn’t have access to information about who needed what.”

Similar issues surface regarding privately sponsored refugees and their sponsoring groups. Not even EMCN, the most comprehensive agency supporting PSRs, has access to a list of sponsorship matches. That’s a significant concern, says CEO Erick Ambtman. “The sooner a refugee is connected to a settlement agency, the better the outcome. That’s what the research says.” As one step toward closing that knowledge gap, in future the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program will be alerted of all private sponsorship applications.

“There are things private sponsors don’t know but we know because we do it every day. That’s why collaboration is really strong, because we can fill in the things that they, as sponsors, don’t know, but they do the friendship-on-the-ground connecting, which is such a vital component of positive settlement.”

Suzanne Gross, EMCN

What’s also needed is a more deliberate hand-off from the initial settlement team to neighbourhood agencies, says IRCC’s John Biles. “RAP workers need to do an about-face and get the next group off the plane. But once newcomers are in their neighbourhood, we don’t want them left to their own devices so they only come back if they’re in crisis.” IRCC is considering a case management system used in Winnipeg that triages government-assisted refugees into three streams depending on their level of need, sending some for more intensive support and others directly to grassroots agencies while also ensuring that newcomers are more deliberately supported as they move from one agency to another.

As a community, we need to ensure that all refugees receive a level of support that equips them to put down healthy roots so that they can flourish and contribute, as so many are eager to do.

“We’re delivering services, and hopefully very well. But we’re missing a step. That continuing support is missing.”

Wendy Mah, Syrian Newcomer Stakeholder Coordinator

Suggestions

- Create a system for consistently alerting agencies of the needs of refugees they are equipped to serve while respecting privacy concerns.
- Address funding-related capacity issues.
- Re-evaluate the inbuilt differences between GAR and PSR support.
- Ensure that all private sponsors know about and can easily access supports and services, including the Refugee Sponsorship Training Program.
- Provide a refugee hotline in the dominant language(s) of arriving newcomers.
- Use social media (e.g., WhatsApp Messenger) to link providers and connect refugees with nearby people and services.

SNAPSHOT 13

EDMONTON EMERGENCY RELIEF SERVICES FIRE RESPONSE SUGGESTS SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

As the agency accepting and dispensing donated goods for Syrian refugees, Edmonton Emergency Relief Services (EERS) was doubly inundated in May, when fires around Fort McMurray forced thousands to flee to Edmonton. Working from multiple locations to supply evacuees the basics of life, EERS employed efficiencies that made its work with refugees seem cumbersome by contrast.

Introduced to WhatsApp Messenger, they found the app extremely useful for sounding alerts when goods, food or people were needed at particular locations. CEO Cindi Hache and emergency relief support connector Dalia Abdellatif say such technology could prove useful among agencies serving Syrian refugees as well.

The fire response also pointed out the value of a unified, cross-agency tracking system. The Red Cross assigned each fire evacuee a number for use across all agencies and sent everyone to EERS with a referral sheet co-designed by the two agencies. Syrian refugees did not have a similar identifier, so staff tracked them by name, which proved confusing as a wife in Syria rarely shares her husband's last name. Cindi and Dalia recommend making one agency responsible for registering all refugee families as the Red Cross does for fire victims, and creating a common database to coordinate services.

A unified tracking system could also alert EERS of newly settled families in urgent need of supplies. "CSS, they were trying, but they were overwhelmed," Dalia says. "As soon as they got a house for a family, they said, 'We'll settle them today and take them shopping tomorrow,' but that doesn't work." Although CSS was reluctant to share the names of those families, word would reach ERSS from concerned friends or social workers. Dalia made numerous emergency deliveries to families who had furniture but no blankets or food or milk to get them through the night.

EERS also recommends that refugees who receive a budget for kitchen start-up turn first to EERS for kitchen supplies rather than purchasing those supplies elsewhere, so their dollars stretch to cover more of their needs. Some Syrians already do that, notes EMCN's Suzanne Gross. "They were very clever that way, which is part of their resilience."

"If the family has been in a hotel room for a month, then I know to go get them a few toys. I like to have this connection—a friendly face, a smile, a hug."

Cindi Hache, EERS



Photo by Cindi Hache

VOLUNTEERS WORKED TO ORGANIZE AND SHIP AN INFLUX OF DONATIONS IN THE WAKE OF THE FORT MCMURRAY WILDFIRES.

6. Racism

Lurking underneath the warm welcome Syrian refugees receive from most Edmontonians are signs of racism: A shouted, “Go back home,” in a transit station. A schoolyard slur or fistfight. A hateful poster stuffed into the mailbox. A police report made by a misunderstanding neighbour. Such actions are unlikely to fade away, given the global shift against those who are “not us,” as evidenced in closed borders, mosque bombings and other hate-fueled attacks.

“We have to do something to strengthen what is good about us as a society.”

Deborah Morrison, M.A.P.S., at COSI

Both local and provincial governments identify racism as a crucial issue. The Province of Alberta has embarked on consultations with the aim of creating an anti-racism strategic plan, and the City of Edmonton has identified “eliminate racism” as the first of six “game changers” in the multi-partner End Poverty Edmonton initiative. It’s crucial to base such efforts on a scan of best practices around the world as well as frank discussions with targeted individuals and groups about what has not worked in the past, here and elsewhere.

Previous migration stories include chapters on the harm that almost certainly results when newcomers are treated as intruders. As John Ibbitson writes in *The Globe and Mail*, “Unless the native population honestly embraces multiculturalism, immigrants may fail to integrate, settling into impoverished and resentful ethnic enclaves—something we also see in parts of Europe.”

Statistics Canada says hate crimes reported by police increased more in Alberta than any other province in 2015, rising 39% to 193. Police say the increase was primarily driven by increased reported incidents against the Muslim, Arab or west Asian populations.

When seeking integration, it’s not enough to focus on the people being settled, notes Noelle Jaipaul of the City of Edmonton’s multicultural relations office. “There has to be an intentional focus on preparing the mainstream community as a big part of the work.” Umbrella groups such as the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO) and Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL) can play key roles in shifting discourse, she adds. “Not necessarily by adding programs and people, but by entering into dialogues to build greater understanding and inclusion.”

Racism is based at least in part on fear of the unknown. It follows that countering racism requires making the unknown known. Creating opportunities for Edmontonians to learn about, meet, hear the stories of and build relationships with our new neighbours.

During the Syrian influx, COSI teamed up with the Centre for Race & Culture to offer provincially funded workshops that invited service providers and members of the public to put themselves in refugees’ shoes and hear their stories. “Once people know refugees are human beings with a pre-migration story, they have empathy,” says Niga Jalal, who led the workshops. “It’s just about busting those myths.”

Sponsors and volunteers report similar experiences of coming to know and admire the tenacity and hope they find among the Syrians who have moved here. “The word ‘refugee’ has kind of a negative connotation, but to me, being a refugee is strength,” says Fatima Al Sayah, who has interviewed dozens of Syrian newcomers for federally funded research. “These people went through a lot of difficult things, and they survived.”

Other local initiatives aimed at building understanding and trust include:

- An AAISA manual (aaisa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/hremf-pg_final.compressed.pdf) and other resources to help settlement staff counter racism and Islamophobia
- Videography by the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights to dispel myths about Syrian newcomers and tell their stories

- An IFSSA photo voice project to capture Syrian youth's experiences with Islamophobia
- Plain language resources to counter discrimination among immigrant seniors being prepared by the Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta
- Exploration at the Edmonton Shift Lab of potential prototypes for service, policy, systems and community action to help reduce racism as it contributes to poverty

It's important to build on such efforts rather than assuming the job is done now that the bulk of the expected Syrian refugees have arrived.

"If we don't interact with people and see them on a human level, it's much easier to 'other' people."

Stephanie Kot, AAISA

Suggestions

- Base municipal and provincial anti-racism strategies on a scan of internationally proven best practices, coupled with the lived experiences of multicultural residents.
- Work toward a similarly evidence-based pan-Canadian anti-racism strategy.
- Revise school curricula to equip students to identify and combat racism.
- Provide and require experiential, reality-grounded anti-racism training of government staff.
- Encourage other employers to routinely require anti-racism training among staff.
- Promote anti-racism resources widely and make sure they are used.

7. Community Inclusion

The 2,000-plus Syrians Edmonton welcomed recently have potential to contribute to our community in ways we can only imagine. Will that potential be realized? That depends in large measure on whether this latest wave of newcomers is invited in to all aspects of our city, from neighbourhood living rooms to the halls of power. Not only to participate but to co-create.

Syrians often comment on the warmth of the welcome they received in their first months here. They recall enthusiastic airport greetings, welcoming events, attentive sponsors, compassionate settlement staff, generous strangers. Those early signs of hospitality meant a lot at a time of upheaval and loss—and deserve inclusion in any future welcome plans.



Photo: The Canadian Press/Jason Franson

UNITED

The 2017 edition of Edmonton's Heritage Days Festival included the first-ever full Syrian pavilion, where Mostafa Khalis and Manar Shakeouf shared their wedding ceremony with all who passed by. The pavilion is one evidence among many of the newcomers' desire to be involved in the life of our city.

“Nights Out became real cathartic experiences—and I think that’s an amazing way to bridge people into their new reality. I would like to do that for all refugees within the first month: to have some kind of civic gathering where we can all grieve loss from war and celebrate hope in a future in Canada.”

Suzanne Gross, EMCN

Refugees from Syria also remark that, although Canadians are friendly, they live rather isolated lives and seem reluctant to draw newcomers into their networks. Coming from a culture where people visit often and spontaneously, many hunger to rub shoulders with people who’ve lived here longer and begin weaving into the daily fabric of Edmonton life.

“I’m a refugee. It took me 15 years to be invited into a Canadian house. And I have two PhDs and a research job at the university.”

Anna Kirova, U of A Education professor, at COSI

There’s growing realization that integrating newcomers into community is a crucial aspect of settlement. In fact, “strengthening the social networks of newcomers and fostering welcoming communities” is a key area of focus in Helping Immigrants Succeed, the federal-provincial-territorial action plan to improve Canada’s approach to settlement.

“We’re going to have to adapt to the reality of immigration, instead of simply expecting immigrants to adapt to life in Canada. That means not only cultural sensitivity, but...understanding that part of our job, broadly, is going to be integration.”

Erick Ambtman, quoted in *We* magazine, 2013

Many private sponsors spend significant time with the families in their care, introducing them to Canadian customs and activities. The CSS Cultural Links program matches newcomers with Canadians who play a similar role. The volunteers typically help with shopping and other daily needs, share what they love about their community and participate in family-friendly events. Various agencies provide opportunities for newcomers to participate meaningfully with people from other cultures. EMCN, for example, hosts Global Girls, Global Choir, Global Gardening, Replanting Roots and Wintegration groups.

What more does it take to open doors to full inclusion—in Edmonton neighbourhoods and in the broader public square? The following pages suggest a few of many avenues deserving greater attention.

Community leagues would seem likely vehicles for welcoming refugees into community life. Embedded in neighbourhoods, offering gathering spaces and programs, they exist to serve and connect surrounding residents. What’s more, league leadership can be a stepping stone to engagement in the broader political process. But attempts to foster ethnically inclusive community leagues have had limited success, with a few notable exceptions (including Duggan, described in the following snapshot). In fact, a common refrain around settlement tables is, “Where are the community leagues?”

“Edmonton is different today than it was 50 years ago. It’s bigger, more diverse, more sophisticated. But we haven’t really made that shift yet to see our organizations reflective of our community.”

Russ Dahms, ECVO

In 2009, the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues hired seven part-time outreach staff from diverse backgrounds with the intent of encouraging and equipping community leagues to embrace their multicultural and Aboriginal neighbours. Despite significant effort supported by a CIP matching grant and multiple settlement agencies, little changed. A final report in 2012 (www.academia.edu/13448138) describes

a mismatch between league operating styles and newcomer needs. Among the report's conclusions: "To create a sense of inclusion for newcomers and Aboriginal communities, the leagues need to transform and become a welcoming place for everyone."

Suggested steps in that direction include:

- free use of community halls
- free or reduced memberships for low income residents
- culturally appropriate programming
- diversity directors and/or champions
- mentorship of potential community leaders
- cultural awareness training and dialogues.

The report also called on all three orders of government to broaden their vision of settlement services. Beyond doctors, schools, and ESL training, the report says, "A new settlement process must include connections to mainstream social, civic, sport and recreational programs and activities."

"The need for us is not just to stay together but to associate with Canadians and know about the life in Canada. If we just stick together, we can't know about different ways—we need contact."

Syrian newcomer speaking at stakeholder meeting

Other efforts to encourage cross-cultural neighbourliness include the Edmonton Multicultural Coalition's **Neighborhood Intercultural Connections Program**. The program encouraged neighbourhoods to form community outreach teams and develop activities based on priorities named by residents. An invitation sent to community leagues to be involved in that work received responses from a handful of leagues.

"Social inclusion is very challenging. If you look around Edmonton, people come and gravitate toward people who look like them and speak like them. They form little pockets within communities. I think that's not integration. That is where you start."

Fatima Al Sayah, Edmonton Refugee Volunteers

Increasing numbers of community leagues are building intercultural and intergenerational connections through **Abundant Communities Edmonton (ACE)**, a grassroots movement supported by the City of Edmonton with funding from such sources as the provincial Community Initiatives Program. ACE relies on volunteer connectors who go out of their way to meet and involve immediate neighbours on their blocks or in their buildings. Some connectors have taken the lead in welcoming refugees and encouraging others to do so. As people get to know each other, natural support networks build, harking back to a time when Canadians lived more in their neighbourhoods. Typical outgrowths include block parties, walking groups, support for vulnerable seniors, expanded volunteering and community gardening. It's a form of asset-based community development that taps personal and group abilities in the way the COSI inclusion model envisions.

Recreation can play a positive role in integration, helping newcomers bond with each other, bridge to the mainstream and gain the confidence to begin linking with larger systems. Efforts to connect newcomers with recreation opportunities abound, from the sports coordinator who makes sure all the newcomer kids in his neighbourhood are signed up for community league soccer and have rides to games to the many sponsors who take their families bowling, skating, swimming, picnicking and camping. Agencies also do their part, arranging recreation centre tours, park outings, drop-in programs and more. Multicultural communities, including members of the Out of School Time Table, also provide purpose-planned recreation, collaborating with civic staff to access space and add newcomer-friendly Green Shack locations and programming. Many others are involved in offering recreation in diverse communities.

"Sports is actually a really great way to get people together. There's a Monday night soccer drop-in league that attracts Syrians because of the location. Many were playing soccer back home. It's a place to do that and also practice their English. So those drop-in programs are really, really helpful."

Mohamed Huque, IFSSA

Whistling in the Dark

Somkhuun Thongdee, a multicultural leader whose family escaped the killing fields in Cambodia, cautions that integration requires welcoming practices as well as programs. Knowing that many children from immigrant and refugee families avoid athletic programs because the sound of a whistle reminds them of negative encounters with police in refugee camps, for example, he urges coaches and referees to shift from whistles to hand signals. “It may not be your job to deal with PTSD, but don’t make it worse,” he says. The same caution applies to any organization serving newcomers; no matter how good the program, thoughtless words and actions can do more harm than good.

Despite all that, most Syrian refugees interviewed by AAISA said they rarely if ever participate in recreation or sports. Their answers may reflect the fact that they are busy attending to urgent settlement needs and that physical activity plays a different role in Syria. But those responses also raise questions about access and affordability. Do Syrian families feel welcome in our recreation centres? Have friends or neighbours ever invited them along? Are they aware of fee-reduction programs? Do other barriers keep them from going?

Civic leadership is crucial to addressing systemic barriers and making inclusion the norm. The City of Edmonton’s leadership in this area is grounded in several documents, including Immigration and Settlement Policy C529. Passed in 2007 amid concerns that the city was not attracting its share of newcomers, the policy names these eight civic priorities:

1. economic integration
2. intergovernmental relations
3. service access and equity
4. planning and co-ordination
5. communication
6. public awareness and education
7. community building and inclusion
8. immigrant women

Edmonton also signed onto the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination in 2007, passed a Diversity and Inclusion Policy (C538) in 2008, joined a provincial Network of Welcoming and Inclusive Communities coordinated through the Alberta Urban Municipalities Association and developed a Racism Free Edmonton Action Plan.

A Diversity and Inclusion office that initially reported to the city manager no longer exists, but the City does have a diversity consultant within human resources as well as a multicultural relations section within Citizen Services. That unit supports both grassroots and civic initiatives, including the new umbrella body, ELIP.



PLAYING TOGETHER

Having been welcomed by Indigenous Peoples at community events and feeling a sense of common struggle, Syrian newcomers were delighted when their youth were invited to participate in an exhibition soccer match during the World Indigenous Nations Games at nearby Maskwacis and Enoch Cree Nation in July 2017. The newcomers have been invited to attend future games, and to spend time at the Manaciso (Respect Yourself) Healing Centre.

Civic initiatives include a Newcomer Guide in multiple languages, a New Arrival Information Centre and 3-1-1 service with interpretive services in 150-plus languages, and immigration and settlement community gatherings at City Hall. The City's recently initiated Emerging Immigrant and Refugee Community (EIRC) Grant Program helps multicultural groups find affordable space, fund projects, host community events and partner to address gaps. The City is piloting intercultural training with department staff and agencies receiving FCSS funding. The City also funds free interpreting services in family court, a joint initiative of United Cultures of Canada Association, ASSIST Community Services Centre, Edmonton Community Legal Centre, and Family Law Office (Legal Aid Alberta).

As Syrians arrived, civic support included a central web portal, free meeting space, facility tours, transit passes, response to emergent needs (such as printing orientation manuals for CSS) and involvement in stakeholder meetings. Edmonton Police Services efforts included a duo that is continuing to intentionally befriend and engage Syrian newcomers as well as involvement in a two-week REACH Police and Youth Engagement program. Positive responses to both EPS efforts point to the importance of reaching out to newcomers where they are at.

“Our youth loved being around police. They couldn't stop talking about it. It's really inspiring to see them go from not wanting to look at police to wanting to be a police officer. And it can be a pathway out of poverty.”

Hala Mustafa, Syrian Family Support Centre

Other requested signs of municipal leadership include a prominent mayoral presence and welcome as people arrive, affordable use of civic services such as transit during the reception phase, a larger role in coordinating the community's settlement resources, advocacy for system change and redoubled efforts to encourage full inclusion in community.

Suggestions

- Broaden the definition and funding of settlement success to include integration into community life.
- Offer incentives for community leagues, athletic groups and other community entities to be more welcoming of newcomers.
- Ensure that existing initiatives, such as Abundant Communities Edmonton, embrace refugees and other newcomers.
- Support community and faith groups offering activities that foster newcomer identity and belonging.
- Ensure that practices as well as programs contribute to rather than inhibit inclusion.

SNAPSHOT 14

DUGGAN COMMUNITY LEAGUE WELCOMES BHUTANESE NEWCOMERS

The Duggan Community League has played a key role in rolling out the welcome mat for refugees with roots in Bhutan—and gained active new members in return. The coming together of these two communities offers an instructive example of how inclusion can work.

Nepalese-speaking Bhutanese refugees began arriving in 2009, and within a few years about 80 were clustered in the Duggan neighbourhood. Facing many settlement challenges after decades of displacement, the newcomers wanted to do things together, as they had back home. CSS hired one of them, Narad Kharel, to serve as a navigator and bridge to the wider community.

The Duggan Community League was already taking steps to better reflect its diverse community: serving Hallal foods, providing childcare during meetings, offering rental discounts, improving communication. The board welcomed Narad at monthly meetings, threw a community-wide welcome barbecue and invited widespread Bhutanese participation by offering free membership, free soccer registration, free use of the hall for cultural celebrations and other events, an expanded green shack program and more. The league also used its newsletter to share the newcomers' history, culture, language, and experience as refugees. As then-President Roger Plouffe put it, "These are very gifted people. How can we not want to include them in our community?"

"The way the Bhutanese connected with Duggan, we see as really ideal. It was a perfect storm of goodness that ended up working really well."

Kathryn Friesen, CSS

Bhutanese residents now regularly attend and volunteer for community league programs and events. They give back in many ways, including cleanup days that involve at least one member of each family. And they are overjoyed when community members attend their festive cultural celebrations. In short, refugees from Bhutan are now integral to the larger community. As a bonus, others in the neighbourhood are becoming more active and involved, Roger reports. "They're saying 'How can we help?' because they like what's going on."

"We didn't go out looking for non-European participation. We just made ourselves open. By doing that, it happened on its own."

Roger Plouffe, Duggan Community League



ROGER PLOUFFE AND A YOUNG FRIEND



DUGGAN RESIDENTS AND FRIENDS ENJOY A CELEBRATION HOSTED BY BHUTANESE NEIGHBOURS IN THE COMMUNITY HALL

SNAPSHOT 15

EDMONTON MULTICULTURAL COALITION: GROWING TOGETHER

For many newcomers, there's a large gap between living in a neighbourhood and actually being part of it. Attempts to narrow that gap in northeast Edmonton include a community garden at the Londonderry Community League, an initiative of the Edmonton Multicultural Coalition.

The garden grew out of an ESL program at nearby Emmanuel Community Church, also coordinated by the coalition. Hailing from diverse cultures, the gardeners have nurtured rich friendships in just a few seasons, working side by side and gathering over monthly potlucks and holiday celebrations.

For many, gardening and learning English offer welcome social times in isolated lives, observes Edmonton Multicultural Coalition Project coordinator Yodit Tesfamicael. "Gardening and ESL are tools. They are great ways to learn, for sure, but people also want to make friends and have fun—to feel like they're a part of the community and can contribute. We always make sure that's the focus, and not get hung up on the details of what we're doing."

Now the gardeners are hoping to work together with mainstream neighbours who have expressed interest in community gardening. But they're encountering challenges, including differing visions for use of the garden space, civic red tape and a community league board whose energy is drained by maintaining a large facility with few volunteers.

Through dialogue, and with the coalition helping to navigate unfamiliar systems, it's hoped a vision will take shape that keeps the garden affordable and inviting to all.

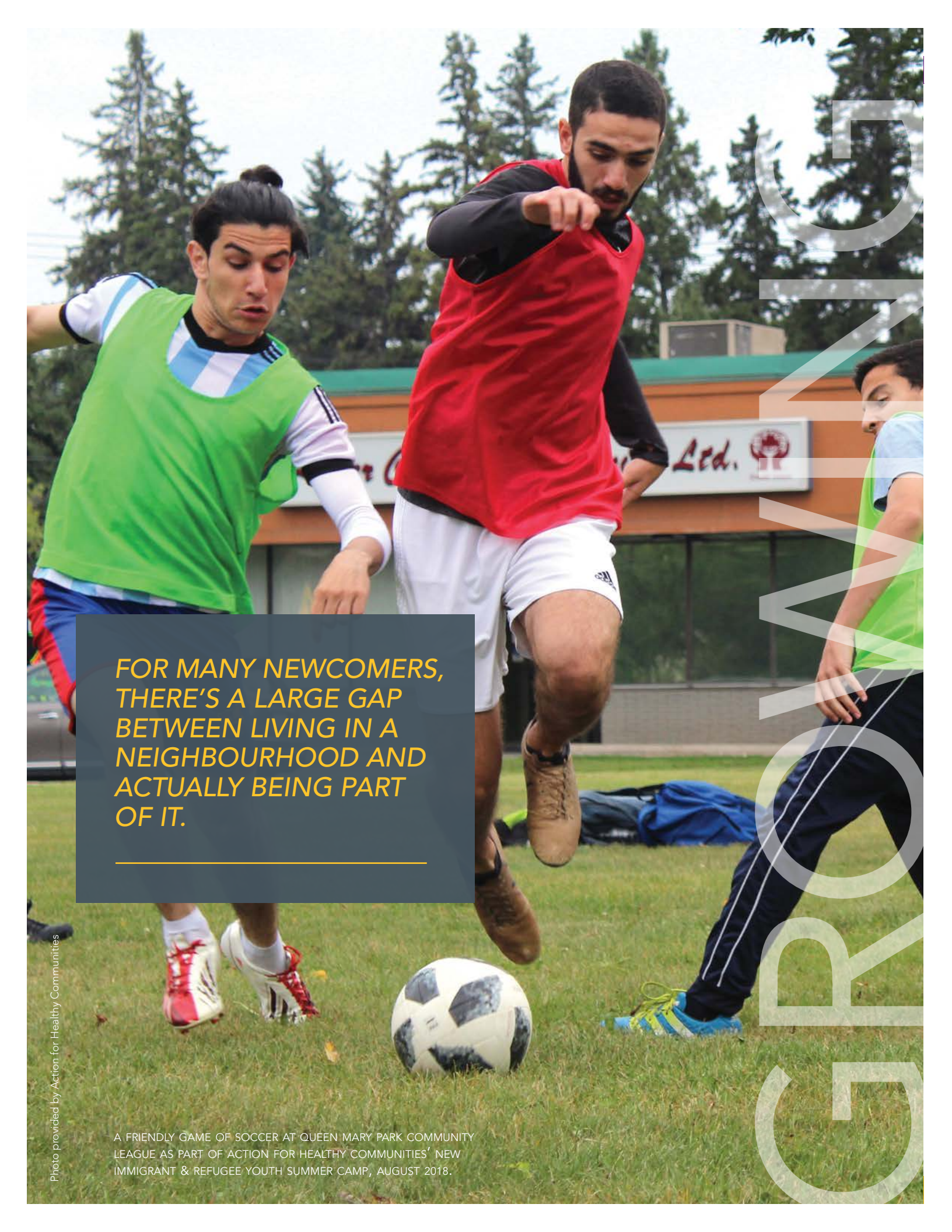
"Many community leagues are so tied down by operational needs—fixing the roof, making sure no pipes burst, taking care of the garbage—that they don't have capacity to do governance. Then you lose sight of the vision, and you're stuck doing operations day to day."

Yodit Tesfamicael,
Edmonton Multicultural Coalition

Although most homeowners in the neighbourhood have their own backyard gardens, many newcomers live in apartments where space is limited, Tesfamicael notes. "A lot of them are really good gardeners. They had gardens wherever they came from, and they're itching to do it again."

Even low-energy community leagues can help meet newcomers' food security and social needs by doing things as simple as sharing their space, Yodit notes. One cultural group used the Parkdale-Cromdale hall for classes on making Canadian food and cooking on a budget, funded by an Edmonton Multicultural Coalition seed grant. The WeCan food basket, which recently expanded to include affordable Halal food in partnerships with IFSSA and the multicultural coalition, turned to community agencies to help distribute the food.

As Tesfamicael says, "There are tons of ways to get involved and engaged."



**FOR MANY NEWCOMERS,
THERE'S A LARGE GAP
BETWEEN LIVING IN A
NEIGHBOURHOOD AND
ACTUALLY BEING PART
OF IT.**

05



THE IMPORTANCE OF TAKING STOCK

As those involved ponder Edmonton's experience in welcoming Syrian refugees, it's not uncommon to hear, "We've welcomed waves of refugees before, yet it seems we were inventing systems as we went along. Shouldn't there be a better way?"

"My first reaction with the Syrian refugees was, 'We're Canada. We've built ourselves on these kinds of journeys. Don't we have a template?' Let's just keep what we've learned, so next time it happens we're ready."

Doug Piquette, ERIEC

The energy and attention attracted by this latest wave of refugees offers yet another opportunity to co-create a community-wide approach that serves all who come, both at the initial welcome stage and long-term. The Syrian influx is the subject of significant research that is providing fodder for ideas, and for innovation. In addition to the initial ELIP study and AAISA research, numerous focused studies are being funded, many of which combine academic and frontline expertise. As John Biles of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada remarked at a 2016 AAISA consultation, Alberta's response to the Syrian influx has increased leadership capacity across the province. That's certainly true in Edmonton. The expertise is here. Together, we should be able to learn from the experience of welcoming our new Syrian neighbours and build a better way.

"Our agency, like many others helping with this particular issue last year, was very much in reactive mode, when there was huge public attention and funding, and a lot of agencies working at breakneck speed to make sure we can take on the influx. Now that has subsided, we can be more deliberate in how we develop and plan."

Mohamed Huque, IFSSA, at COSI

That better way would meet the immediate needs refugees express most acutely, including these:

- Poverty
- Language training
- Employment
- Housing
- Health
- Mental health
- Family reconfiguration
- Education

"There's great generosity. People have reached out in all sorts of ways, and not always helpfully. Is there anything we can learn from this so in the next wave there are things we can put in the hands of skillful volunteers? So they can help without depleting their helpfulness, and have more resilience as the helper, too?"

Cheryl Whitelaw, Applied Research Manager, NorQuest

That better way would also reorient systems with the following goals:

- Inter-agency coordination
- Client-centred service
- Cultural navigation
- Volunteer mobilization
- Comprehensive tracking
- Countering racism
- Community inclusion

That better way would incorporate the wisdom of the COSI model, with its deliberate attention to the bonds, bridges and links needed for full inclusion in a new culture.

“We should tie the number of immigrants we welcome to the allocation of resources to welcome them in a way that fosters long-term social inclusion and meaningful participation.”

Monique Nutter, submission to IRCC consultation

The AAISA Resettlement Experience Study concludes by recommending that the next phase of work focus on, “the design of a comprehensive refugee resettlement roadmap for Alberta,” with the goal of improving, standardizing and coordinating service delivery. It’s important for Edmonton to have a clear sense of its own landscape so that work at the provincial level dovetails with and ideally advances what can be accomplished here.

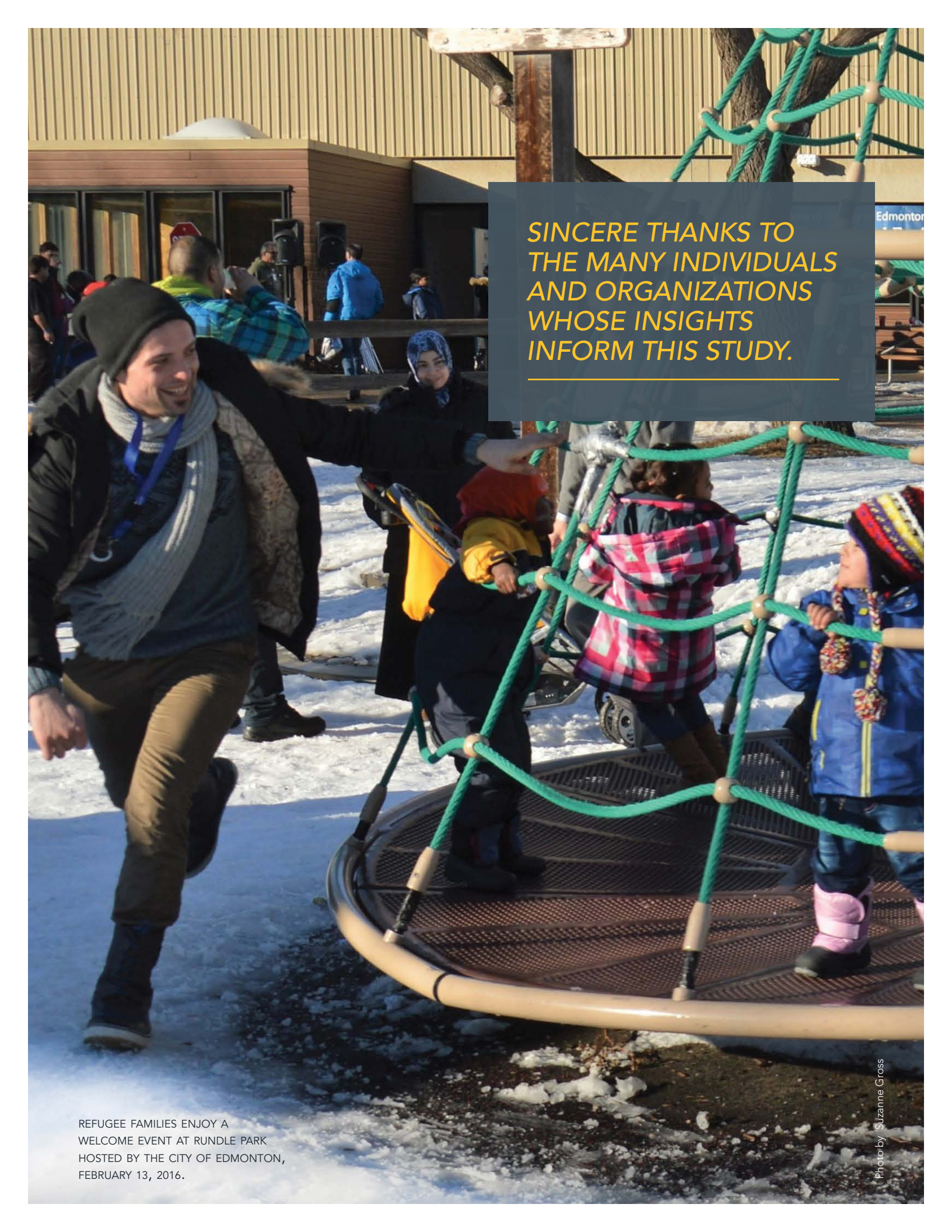
A more holistic, client-centred, coordinated approach to welcoming newcomers is overdue. In the words of the Conference Report based on the Canadian Council for Refugees Spring 2017 Consultation held in Edmonton, “In seeking the best possible outcomes for newcomers, the choice facing settlement agencies is not whether to change but how.” That same choice faces us all.

“When people come here, it’s everybody’s job to make them welcome. I think everybody’s got a lot to learn. We need to begin fairly specifically, even if very geographically. Where are the most important points to begin? What needs to happen? And who does what?”

Russ Dahms, ECVO

SYRIAN DANCERS PERFORMING AS PART OF THE NEWCOMER TENT AT THE 2016 SERVUS HERITAGE FESTIVAL.

THE ENERGY AND ATTENTION ATTRACTED BY THIS LATEST WAVE OF REFUGEES OFFERS YET ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO CO-CREATE A COMMUNITY-WIDE APPROACH THAT SERVES ALL WHO COME, BOTH AT THE INITIAL WELCOME STAGE AND LONG-TERM.



*SINCERE THANKS TO
THE MANY INDIVIDUALS
AND ORGANIZATIONS
WHOSE INSIGHTS
INFORM THIS STUDY.*

REFUGEE FAMILIES ENJOY A
WELCOME EVENT AT RUNDLE PARK
HOSTED BY THE CITY OF EDMONTON,
FEBRUARY 13, 2016.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWS

The following list attempts to recall every organization and person involved in an interview. Thanks as well to the many who welcomed me in to various settlement circles.

Action for Healthy Communities

- Rola Chehayeb, Settlement Case Manager
- Fikrat Alali, Anas Al Mohammad and their children, Syrian newcomers supported by Action for Healthy Communities

Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA)

- Amy Crofts, Marketing & Communications Project Officer
- Stephanie Kot, Team Lead – Research, Policy and Sectorial Engagement

ASSIST Community Services Centre

- Michelle LaRue, Project Coordinator, Strengthening Child Safety with New Immigrant Families in Edmonton

Bredin Centre for Learning

- Tarek Fath Elbab, Settlement Counselor

Catholic Social Services

- Alice Colak, Vice-President, Immigration and Settlement
- Ese Ejebe, Program Manager, Ongoing Immigration and Settlement Services
- Kathryn Friesen, Manager, Refugee Resettlement Assistance Program
- Jim Nguyen, Refugee Resettlement Assistance Program
- Astrid Velasquez, Refugee Health Promotion

City of Edmonton

- Jennifer Fowler, Director, Multicultural Relations

Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO)

- Russ Dahms, Executive Director
- Gemma Dunn, Director of Programs and Initiatives

Edmonton Emergency Relief Services Society

- Dalia Abdellatif, Emergency Relief Support Connector
- Cindi Hache, CEO

Edmonton Immigrant Services Association

- Oliver Kamau, Manager, Settlement Services

Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership (ELIP)

- Noelle Jaipaul, former project leader/liaison

Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN)

- Erick Ambtman, Executive Director
- Suzanne Gross, Manager of Community Engagement Programs and Partnerships

Edmonton Multicultural Coalition

- Yodit Tesfamicael, Project Coordinator

Edmonton Public Library (EPL)

- Chrissy Hodgins, Londonderry Branch

Edmonton Refugee Volunteers

- Dr. Fatima Al Sayah, Co-founder
- Julie Kamal, Co-founder

Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council (ERIEC)

- Doug Piquette, Executive Director

Immigrant Access Fund Canada

- Cathy Ito, Outreach Coordinator

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada

- Elisha Astles, RAP Manager (formerly Edmonton Settlement Supervisor, RAP)
- John Biles, Assistant Director – Integration Programs (Prairies and Northwest Territories)
- Nita Jolly, Director – Integration

Islamic Family and Social Services Association (IFSSA)

- Mohamed Huque, Executive Director

Mapping and Planning Support Alberta Capital Region (M.A.P.S.)

- Deborah Morrison, Executive Director & Partnership Enhancement Facilitator

Multicultural Health Broker Co-operative

- Yvonne Chiu
- Niga Jalal
- Monique Nutter
- Other cooperative members

Multicultural Family Resource Society

- Winnie Chow-Horn, Executive Director

NorQuest

- Cheryl Whitelaw, Applied Research Manager

North Glenora Refugee Response Group

- Elizabeth Nash, group convenor
- Michelle Young, RN and health coordinator

REACH

- Lindsay Daniller, Director, Community Initiatives and Strategic Development
- Helen Rusich, Project Manager
- Matthew Taylor, Project Manager

Solomon College

- Ping Ping Lee, Program Director

Syria Family Resource Centre

- Zuzan Hussien
- Niga Jalal
- Marvet Kanbour
- Hala Mustafa
- Sabah Tahir
- Elena Yousif
- Various client families and youth

Syria Stakeholder Group

- Wendy Mah, Coordinator (first with CSS, then with ELIP)

University of Alberta

- Rhianna Charchuk, Masters Student, Global Health
- Anna Kirova, Faculty of Education
- Sophie Yohani, Faculty of Education

“There’s a whole new cast of characters every time another wave of refugees comes, and institutional knowledge in people’s minds doesn’t get passed on. People are so busy they don’t have time to sit down and write their memories and reflect on lessons learned.”

Noelle Jaipaul, City of Edmonton

APPENDIX B: PARTIAL LIST OF RESOURCES CONSULTED

- AAISA Provincial Needs Assessment: Improving Refugee Resettlement in Alberta* (2016). Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies. Retrieved from aaisa.ca
- The Age of Wisdom: Giving Voice to Edmonton's Immigrant Seniors and Identifying Their Needs* (2015, October 20). Summary Report by Zenev and Associates for Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council, City of Edmonton. Funded by Age Friendly Edmonton. Retrieved from www.seniorscouncil.net
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